

GURU ARJAN DEV

The sculpture reproduced on the endpaper depicts a scene where three soothsayers are interpreting to King Suddhodana the dream of Queen Maya, mother of Lord Buddha. Below them is seated a scribe recording the interpretation. This is perhaps the earliest available pictorial record of the art of writing in India.

*From : Nagarjunakonda, 2nd century A.D.
Courtesy : National Museum, New Delhi.*

MAKERS OF INDIAN LITERATURE

Guru Arjan Dev

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First Published, 1994

ISBN : 81-7201-769-3

Rs. 15

Printed at Computer Corner, H-15, Uttam Nagar,
New Delhi 110 059.

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Life

Guru Arjan Dev (Arjan Mal) was the youngest of the three sons of Guru Ram Das, the other two being Pirthi Mal and Maha Dev. His mother, Bibi Bhani, was the daughter of Guru Amar Das. If he benefited from this heredity, so did his brothers who were born with an equal advantage. But Arjan Dev's unique spiritual elevation was his own. He was only a toddler when Guru Amar Das remarked, 'this grandson of mine will spread the Word (Bani) far and wide', and this prediction did not take long to come true. Born at Goindwal on 15th April, 1563, he took over as the fifth Sikh Guru on 1st September, 1581 in pursuance of the command of Guru Ram Das.

Pirthi Mal was an ambitious person. Since he had the advantage of seniority over his brothers, it was natural for him to lend his father a helping hand in the conduct of the temporal part of his business, and he played this role not incompetently. But Guruship was not a matter of managing funds donated by devotees or excavating tanks to be consecrated for baths. It was concerned primarily with ridding the disciples in the Master's fold of the shackles of *moh* and *maya* and leading them to salvation through clean living and one-pointed meditation. To achieve this object the Guru had to be an ideal in piety and godliness (spiritual excellence). Pirthi did not seem to pass muster even as a true, faithful, genuine Sikh. He could not as such be considered fit for wearing the Master's mantle.

Compilation of the Granth Sahib

Guru Nanak had been composing hymns from time to time. Devoted disciples like Mansukh, Saldo, Seehan who happened to be around used to put them on paper. These compositions took, in due course, the shape of a book

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which the Guru passed on to his successor at the time of shedding his mortal frame. The spiritual writings of some other great saints (Kabir, Ravidas, Jaidev, etc.), which were in conformity with his teachings, accompanied his book. The Guru had come by this material during his 'udasis' (sojourns) at different times.

Guru Angad, and after him Guru Amar Das, made their own contributions to the above-mentioned compositions and under the latter's directions, Sahansar Ram, a grandson of his, compiled the entire holy writings in two volumes, one comprising 300 leaves and the other 224. The script employed by him was Gurumukhi as perfected by Guru Angad. Because of the books remaining in the possession of Baba Mohan, the third Guru's elder son, they came to be known as Mohan's 'Pothis'.

Ram Das, the fourth Guru, wrote in his own turn a considerable number of religious verses and so did Guru Arjan Dev who stepped into his shoes. Following the example of Guru Nanak, Arjan Dev too collected the mystic compositions of eminent saints of the day and yore from various sources. The mighty volume and perplexing variety of this spiritual literature called for painstaking sifting and marshalling. And for taking the job in hand without the least delay, there was a compelling reason.

Pirithia could not reconcile himself to Guru Arjan Dev, two steps junior to him, ascending his father's holy seat. He declared himself the rightful successor to the august office and began misappropriating offerings from the faithful devotees through devious means. He knew full well that the religious writings possessed by and added to copiously by Guru Arjan went a long way in establishing the legitimacy of the latter's title to Guruship, and he (Pirithia) had no chance of dislodging the reigning Guru's nominee without the prop of a parallel, if not a better scripture. Therefore, he got prepared copies of as many of the previous Guru's compositions as possible and at the same time prompted his son, Meharban, to write hymns the way Arjan Dev was doing. Meharban was talented enough to compose verses in the requisite style. He assumed the appellation of 'Nanak' to pass off his product as genuine Gurbani.

Followers of the Sikh faith were mostly simple folk and it was not easy for them to distinguish Meharban's spurious wares from the true stuff ('Bani'). In order to obviate the possibility of adulteration, as devised by Pirthia with the help of Meharban, the Guru was forced to take up the task of compiling the *Holy Granth* in right earnest.

To start with, Guru Arjan Dev had with him the 'Bani' of his predecessor, Guru Ram Das, and, of course, the hymns he himself had composed. Mohan, the elder son of Guru Amar Das, was possessed of an equally rich treasure in the form of the two *Pothis* which comprised the writings of Guru Nanak, his two successors and some Bhaktas. Getting hold of this collection was of prime importance for the fulfilment of the objective in view.

Guru Arjan Dev sent Bhai Gurdas, one of the outstanding personalities amongst his followers, to secure the *Pothis* from their custodian. But Mohan was deeply grieved for having been ignored when Ram Das was favoured as successor to Guruship and as such it was difficult to persuade him to part with the *Pothis*. Moreover, he had cut himself off from the outside world to a great extent and could not be easily approached. Not surprisingly, the best efforts of Bhai Gurdas cut no ice in as much as Mohan did not grant him even an audience and, in consequence, the request of Guru Arjan Dev for the loan of *Pothis* could not be put to him for consideration.

Baba Budha was another gem of Guru Arjan Dev's court. He had sat at the feet of Guru Nanak and was much revered for his piety, sobriety, wisdom and devotion. On Bhai Gurdas's failure, he was commissioned by Guru Arjan Dev to bring the *Pothis* from Amritsar. He did succeed in entering the chamber of the recluse, but the latter proved too stubborn to pay any attention to his entreaties. At last, Guru Arjan Dev himself proceeded to the residence of Baba Mohan. He seated himself below the window of the sage's room in the upper floor and began singing self-composed eulogies, to the sweet accompaniment of a 'sarinda' (played by himself), that were addressed to Mohan, his maternal uncle, and equally well to Mohan, the Enchanting Almighty (Supreme Being). The humility, suavity and charm of Guru

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Arjan Dev broke down Mohan's resistance and reserve in no time. He came down to meet the supplicant, paid him humble obeisance and surrendered the precious volumes with abundant grace.

On his return journey Guru Arjan Dev met Datu, elder son of Guru Angad, the one who had assaulted Guru Amar Das for superseding him in the matter of succession to Guruship. There were some hymns composed by Guru Nanak and Guru Angad with him, stowed away like waste paper. Arjan Dev asked for and gratefully accepted them as a gift and made them a part of his cherished collection.

Had Guru Arjan contented himself with the fruits of his aforesaid labour, perhaps no sane person could have said that the spiritual material garnered by him for the posterity of followers was in any way inadequate to illuminate their path. But he would leave no stone, big or small, unturned so that his holy book should contain teachings of as many saints as possible. Religion, caste or colour of the writer had no meaning for him and the region from which any one hailed was in the same manner immaterial. He was concerned only with the authenticity of the writer's mystic experience and the catholicity of his vision. The Guru sent knowledgeable emissaries to every place near and far, where a man of God was known to be living or to have lived. Though beyond the sea, even Ceylon did not escape his notice and he managed to get a manuscript of 'Pran Sangli', reputed to have been written by Guru Nanak at the time of his visit to that country.

Now that the collection part of the job was over, the available material was subjected to analytical examination. Some of the writings could not receive approval due to their divergence from the basic philosophy of the Gurus, and some more were rejected as obvious fakes. Kahna, Chhaju, Shah Hussain and Piloo, who had dealt with religious topics, submitted their works personally for inclusion in the Granth under preparation, but these had to be declined for one substantial reason or another.

Thus Guru Arjan Dev had with him compositions (apart from his own, comprising about half the volume) of the four Gurus preceding him - Nanak Dev, Angad Dev, Amar

Das and Ram Das – and more than a dozen saints (quite a few of the latter belonging to castes commonly considered as low). Next to the Gurus, Kabir and Farid were the major contributors. Writings of 19 bards, 17 Hindus (Ball, Bhall, etc.) and 2 Muslim (Satta and Balwand) were also accepted. It is to be noted that though the Gurus belonged to the Punjab, the Bhakats hailed from different, far flung places, viz. Bhikhan (Oudh), Dhanna and Pipa (Rajasthan), Jal Dev (Bengal), Nam Dev and Trilochan (Maharashtra), Kabir, Rama Nand and Ravi Das (Banaras).

Guru Arjan Dev took a lot of pains to give the huge material at hand meticulous arrangement.

The main body of the 'Bani' was divided musical-measure-wise, the measures (Ragas) used being thirty in number. Verses embraced by one particular 'Raga' were further arranged authorwise, hymns of Guru Nanak coming first, next those of Guru Angad, Guru Amar Das and so on. The hymns of Bhakats followed those of the Gurus. Again there was classification with reference to metres, like 'shlokas' preceding 'pauris', 'ashtpadis' trailing 'chaupadas'.

The Granth Sahib started with hymns constituting usual morning, evening, and late evening prayers ('Japuji', 'Rahras', 'Kirtan Sohila') respectively and ended with 'Mundaavnee', a sort of seal meant to fore-close unauthorized additions to the scripture.

What remained to be done was writing out the sacred volume in beautiful hand. On the face of it, it was a clerical job, but it demanded deep and exclusive attention because the book was, of nescessity, to be free from all possible errors.

Guru Arjan Dev got tents pitched in the midst of a thick cluster of trees, about a mile away from Amritsar, to its north-east and there he set up his residence, along with a few selected disciples. Obviously there could be none better than the Guru himself to dictate the contents of the 'Granth', whereas Bhai Gurdas, possessed of profound scholarship and mastery, apart from Punjabi, of Hindi, Sanskrit and Persian filled the role of the scribe ideally. The arduous labour thus undertaken lasted about a year,

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resulting in the finalization of the holy book in all respects in the month of Sawan, Sambal 1661.

So far the *Granth Sahib* was in the form of loose leaves numbering 974. The Guru directed that it be got bound. Bhai Banno, a disciple worth such a trust, was directed to take it to Lahore because competent book-binders were available only there.

Bhai Banno had the Guru's permission to show the book to his own folk at Mangat, a village in Gujrat district of the Punjab. It is interesting to note that Bhai Banno intentionally slowed the pace of his journey onwards to Lahore, and by the time he reached the destination he had a copy of the sacred book too, ready with him, to be put in hard covers.

On his return Bhai Banno presented the two bound volumes to Guru Arjan Dev, who signed only the original one to certify its authenticity. This volume was installed at the Hari Mandir to the accompaniment of a zestful ceremony on Bhadon Shudi, one, 1661 Bk. Bhai Budha was honoured with appointment as the first Head *Granthi*, i.e., custodian of this holy book. Guru Gobind Singh added 59 hymns and 56 'shlokas' written by Guru Teg Bahadur and one 'shloka' of his own composition to the *Granth Sahib*, as compiled by Guru Arjan Dev. Thenceforward this enlarged version of the holy book has been worshipped by the Sikhs as their scripture. The original *Pothi Sahib*, as Guru Arjan named it, rests in a Gurdwara at Kartarpur (Jalandhar district).

The Golden Temple

The tank, in the centre whereof the edifice now known as 'Golden Temple' stands, was got excavated (the digging started in 1577 A.D.) by Guru Ram Das, the fourth Guru. For that reason it has been referred to as Ram Das Sar, or Ram Das Sarovar. Guru Arjan Dev extended its boundaries, added to its depth by further removal of earth and got it brick-lined. Lotus flower is associated by mystics with higher spiritual regions. Even otherwise, growing in a pond it contributes to the beauty of its surroundings. Keeping the said factors in his mind, Guru Arjan, it seems,

decided to construct a temple in the midst of the tank conceived by his mentor.

Hindu temples are traditionally built on an elevated plinth. It lends them additional grandeur. But the Guru's primary concern was spiritual uplift of his followers. To him it was more important that the people paying a pious visit to the sacred place should be imbued with the spirit of humility, nay, complete surrender and their descending a few steps to approach its precincts was visualised as conducive to the achievement of that object. Hence the temple was built at a level lower than the structures to be found in its neighbourhood. Again, Hindu places of worship have a single opening towards the East, whereas Muslim mosques afford just one entry in the West. However, Guru Arjan's temple was intended to embrace and benefit the entire human race. Therefore, discarding all distinctions, whatever considerations they were based on, it provided doorways in all the four directions. Even its foundation stone was got laid by a renowned Muslim Sufi Saint, Mian Mir.

There was to be no idol or image to serve as the object of worship in the temple because the Guru believed only in One Attributeless Supreme Being. The construction work starting on 1st of Magh, 1645 Bikrami, reached completion in about sixteen years' time. Then the holy Granth, which carried spiritual guidance for ultimate redemption and catered to one and all, was installed therein in July 1604 A.D. on Bhadon Shudi, 1, 1661 Bikrami to be exact.

In Sambat 1819 Ahmed Shah Abdali razed the temple to the ground and filled up the tank. But the site was recaptured by the Khalsa forces in 1821 and the tank and the temple were restored to their pristine glory under the guidance of General Jassa Singh Ahluwalia¹.

With the passage of time a big city developed around the temple and it came to be recognized as one of the

1 A legend goes that the foundation stone laid by Mian Mir was disturbed by the mason to satisfy his own idea of its proper placement and thereon Guru Arjan Dev had remarked that the temple should be built anew. Abdali's blasting the edifice proved this prophesy's correct.

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foremost commercial centres of the country. Its sweet name, Amritsar (reservoir or nectar), is derived from the sacred tank, Ramdas Sarovar.

Excavation of another tank was initiated by Guru Ram Das within the area of Guru Ka Chak or Ramdasapura itself and that project too was brought to completion by Guru Arjan Dev in 1645 Bikrami. This tank is known as Santokhsar.

Construction of Ram Sar close to the place where the *Granth Sahib* was compiled and given its final shape during 1659-60 Bikrami also deserves a mention. Sukhmani (Jewel of Bliss), one of the best known compositions of Guru Arjan Dev, was written on the banks of this tank.

Guru Arjan Dev bought a big tract of land comprised in the revenue estates of Khara and Palasaur, 15 miles away from Amritsar and excavated a tank even larger than Ramdas Sarovar in 1647 Bikrami and founded the town called Tarn Taran in 1653. It has been quite popular as a place of pilgrimage all along.

Kartarpur, situated between Amritsar and Jalandhar, is another important town which owes its origin to Guru Arjan Dev. It sprawls around the sacred tank, Gangsar, constructed by him. It is renowned all over the country for its well-crafted sturdy furniture.

When Sulhi Khan, a powerful officer of the Mughal Emperor, proceeded to attack the Guru under the garb of revenue collection, the latter shifted his residence to Wadali, a village in the neighbourhood. Wadali was plagued by paucity of water and to remove it the Guru constructed an unusually large well, water wherefrom could be drawn with the help of six 'harts', i.e. Persian wheels. Now a suburb of Amritsar, boasting of some important industrial units, the locality still carries the name of that well, Chheharta.

The Birth of Hargobind

Guru Arjan Dev and Mata Ganga had lived in wedlock for quite some time but were still to be blessed with a child. Any normal married woman would take issuelessness as an unbearable misfortune, and it was not unnatural on

the part of Mata Ganga to long for motherhood. On the other hand, Karmo, wife of Pirthia, was lamenting all the time her husband's supersession for Guruship. She never tired of spitefully reminding him that if he had not failed to win the goodwill of his father, all the prosperity enjoyed by Arjan Dev should have been his and hordes of people right up to Kings would have paid obeisance to him. On his part, Pirthia continued to assure her that since Arjan Dev had no offspring of his own, Meharban's ascending the throne was a certainty and she would then be rolling in wealth and basking in glory.

It is said that walls have ears. Somehow Mata Ganga came to know of Karmo's reproaches and Pirthia's day dreams and she made a fervent appeal to Guru Arjan Dev for the grant of a son. The Guru answered her entreaties with the advice, "Do not bother about petty worldly matters and devote yourself whole-heartedly to God's realization." However, in the face of her persistence he relented ultimately and guided her to seek the favour in question from Baba Budha. Baba, a disciple of Guru Nanak, lived in a jungle, performing lowly services like cutting grass for the cows, and chopping wood for the free community kitchen.

Mata Ganga arranged the preparation of choice delicacies and set off for Baba Budha's hut with a large number of attendants. Her cortege comprised carriages of all sorts which raised much noise and dust. Baba, upset by this unusual spectacle, blurted out, "What turmoil at Amritsar has caused this crowd to scurry hither?" He refused to partake of the viands offered to him, contending that indulgence in this type of rich food did not go well with rendering of menial services as had fallen to his lot. With regard to the object, which had brought Mata Ganga to him, he remarked that the Guru himself was the repository of all spiritual powers, bestowal of no gift was beyond him and she should, therefore, approach him for the fulfillment of her wish. Back home she learnt from Guru Arjan Dev that, thanks to the pomp and show displayed by her, her visit to Baba's abode had earned for her a curse rather than a boon. He advised her to shun flaunting her status and to appear before the Baba as a humble mendicant.

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Following her husband's instructions, Mata Ganga baked simple *chapatis*, flour wherefor she had ground with her own hands, and decided to serve them along with raw onions and butter milk only. This time she walked on foot, her heart full of reverence, all alone. The Baba took the frugal meal, with delight, to his fill. The good wishes that followed led to the Mata giving birth to a son, who was not only winsomely handsome but also a great warrior and a perfect saint, on 14th June, 1595.

Scrutiny of the Granth Sahib

The detractors of Guru Arjan were not happy with his compilation of a scripture for his followers. They apprehended that the universal appeal of its teachings would stem the tide of Muslim faith. The impression made by the Guru on Akbar, who himself was endeavouring to forge unity amongst votaries of different religions through synthesis of their philosophies, still rankled in their minds. With the nefarious design of hoisting Arjan Dev with his own petard, the said coterie of his enemies complained to Emperor Akbar that the *Granth* prepared by him blasphemed Islam and its Prophet and urged that such a vile misdeed should not go unpunished. Upset by the gravity of the charge, Akbar issued orders that the Guru be produced before him along with the *Granth*. The Guru complied by sending the Holy Book in the custody of Bhai Budha, its Granthi, and Bhai Gurdas, its scribe, both well-conversant with its contents.

When the Book was opened, Akbar turned a few leaves and pointed his finger to a particular 'shabad'. It was a hymn in Telang Raga. Bhai Gurdas read it out for him:

The Almighty infused His light into dust
And thus, the world, the Universe
Was brought into being.
He is the Creator of the sky,
The earth, the vegetation,
The waters, all.
O man, whatsoever the eye beholds
Must perish.
The world feeding on carrion,
Bewitched by greed,

Is oblivious of God. Pause.
 This world is a habitat of animals,
 Even of ghosts and goblins;
 It consumes what is forbidden.
 Keep your mind in check,
 Else you will suffer punishments in hell.
 Your generous patrons, brothers,
 Royal courts, wealth and palaces
 Shall be of no use when the Angel of Death
 Puts you in shackles.
 The Lord, pure, knows all about you,
 Says, Nanak, you seek the grace of His Saints
 So that you be saved¹.

(Raga Telang, p. 723)

Akbar found the 'shabad' to be beyond exception but Pirthia pleaded that it appeared to have been reproduced by Bhai Gurdas from memory and was not a part of the Granth's contents. To satisfy himself further, the Emperor requisitioned the help of Sahib Dayal, a passerby, who was proficient in Gurmukhi script, and asked him to read out another 'shabad' at random. This time the recited piece turned out to be :

The Lord, though lodged within his self,
 Man does not behold.

-
- 1 Khaak noor kardang aalam duniaye
 Asmaan jimeen darakht aab
 Paidaayash khudaaye.
 Bandey chasham deedang phanaaye;
 Duneeya murdaar khurdanee
 Gaaphal hawaaye. Rahao.
 Galbaan haiwaan haraam kushtanee
 Murdaar bakhoraaye.
 Dil kabaj kabja kaadro
 Dojak sajaaye.
 Wall niamat biraadraan
 Darbaar milk khaanaaye.
 Jab ajraaeel bastnee
 Tab cheh kaarey bidaaye.
 Hawaal maaloom kardang
 Paak Allah.
 Bugo Nanak ardaas
 Pesh darwesh bandaah.

(Raga Telang, p. 723)

He hangs, instead, a stone idol by his neck.
 The worshipper of Maya, misled by delusion
 Wanders and wanders,
 Churning waters he fatigues himself to death. Pause.
 The piece of stone he designates as a god,
 Drowns him along with itself in the end.
 O sinner, O ungrateful wretch,
 A boat of stone carries none across.
 By virtue of his meeting the Guru
 Nanak has come to know the Lord,
 The One who pervades the earth,
 The waters and the space in between
 And is the Author of Destinies¹.

(Raga Suhi, p. 738)

To be trebly sure, Akbar listened to one more 'shabad' from a different leaf. To the discomfiture of Pirthia and his co- conspirators, it proceeded as follows :

Some address you as Ram others as Khuda,
 Some serve you in the name of Gosain,
 Others in that of Allah.
 My Lord, Benevolent, you are the cause of causes,
 Bless me with your grace, O merciful. Pause.
 Some bathe at Hindu holy places,
 By others Haj is performed.
 Some worship in the Hindu style,
 Whereas others bow to you in the form of Namaaz.
 Some read Vedas, others Semitic scriptures,
 Some robe themselves in blue, others in white.
 Some identify themselves as Mohammedans,
 Others as Hindus.
 Some aim at attaining 'bihisht', others at 'swarg'.

1 Ghar menh Thaakur nadar naan aaway,
 Gal menh paahan lay latkaaway.
 Bharmey bhoola saakat phirta,
 Neer birolay khap khap marta. Rahao.
 Jis pahan kau Thakur kehta,
 Oh pahan lay us ko dubata.
 Gunehgaar loon haraamee,
 Paahan naav na paar-giraamee.
 Gur mll Nanak Thaakur Jaata.
 Jal thal mahial pooran Bidhaata.

Says Nanak, whosoever comes to realize,
That it is the Lord's will that prevails,
To him the mystery of the Supreme Being
Is unfolded¹.

(*Raga Ramkali, p. 885*)

The Emperor who carried a sweet remembrance of the Guru from the time of his visit to Goindwal in 1598 A.D. was pleased to find the scripture a real holy book and remarked, "Excepting love and devotion to God, I so far find neither praise nor blame to any one in this *Granth*. It is a volume worthy of reverence". He made an offering of 51 gold mohars to the *Granth Sahib* and bestowed robes of honour on Bhai Budha and Bhai Gurdas. Another such robe was sent to the Guru as a token of his regard.

The End

As already stated, Guru Ram Das had three sons, Pirthi Mal, Mahadev and Arjan Mal. Badly bitten by ambition, Pirthia considered succession to his father's spiritual office as his birth right for the simple reason that he was the first to enter this mortal world. But Guru Ram Das had his own perceptions. His youngest son had distinguished himself by his deep devotion to the Almighty, his innate wisdom, his wide learning, his disarming humility, his purity of mind and other such virtues. He was, therefore, the obvious choice for stepping into the Guru's shoes. But Pirthia could not come to terms with his supersession. He went to the length of heaping insults on his revered father and continued hatching plots against his younger brother till Arjan Dev's soul was delivered of its body.

1 Koe bolay Ram Ram Koe Khudaaye.
Koe seaway Gussalyan koe Allahey.
Kaaran Karan Kareem.
Kirpa dhaar Raheem. Rahao.
Koe naahway teerath koe hajj Jaaye.
Koe karey pooja koe sir niwaaye.
Koe parhey Bed koe Kateb.
Koe odhay neel koe suped.
Koe kahay Turk koe kahay Hindu.
Koe bachhay bhist koe surgindoo.
Kauh Nanak jinhi hukam pachhaata.
Prabh Sahib ka tinhi bhed jaata.

(*Raga Ramkali, p. 885*)

Pirthia appointed himself as the fifth Guru and sent messengers all around for persuading innocent followers of the house of Guru Nanak to seek spiritual guidance from himself. He laid a virtual siege to Ramdasapur, the seat of Guru Arjan, so that both money and provisions for the 'langar' should reach him alone, and his efforts did bear the desired bitter fruit. When Bhai Gurdas returned from Agra after a long tour, undertaken at the behest of Guru Arjan Dev, he was shocked to find the Guru and his family living as paupers, and the community kitchen faring equally badly.

Pirthia complained to Sulhi Khan, a powerful officer concerned with the administration of Batala district, about Arjan Mal having deprived him of the Guruship wrongfully, and by this means invoked intervention from the Emperor at Delhi. At the same time he appealed to the respectables of Amritsar to secure partition of the family assets. In view of a representation received from the Chaudharies, Guru Arjan Dev gave away to Pirthia rental income of the house properties and authorised Mahadev to realize the surcharge payable by the businessmen of Passian Chauk. In consequence, the Guru was left with none of the family assets and yet Pirthia could not bring himself round to burying the hatchet.

Chandu Lal, a khatri belonging originally to Lahore and referred to as 'Dewan' because of the high position held by him in the Finance Ministry at Delhi, was in search of a suitable bridegroom for his daughter. The match-makers who were doing the necessary scouting in this behalf recommended to him Guru Arjan Dev's young son, Har-gobind. Their suggestion, however, revolted Chandu, who ridiculed it with the observation that Guru Arjan was too small a fry to deserve such an honour. But when he was apprised in detail of the great esteem in which the Guru was held by Hindus, Muslims and followers of other religions, the affluence which the rich offerings of innumerable faithfuls had brought him¹ and the unique piety and saintliness of which he was the embodiment, Chandu

1 Moderate expenses of the Guru's own household were taken care of by trade in horses which he managed to organise.

changed his mind and prayed for the alliance through reliable emissaries. But by the time Guru Arjan Dev was formally approached, he had received information about the contemptuous language used by Chandu in the first instance and he declined the offer. Chandu's personal persuasion too failed to change his decision. Oblivious of his own misconduct, Chandu made a grievance of the Guru's refusal and resolved to avenge himself by all conceivable means.

Stationed at Sirhind, Shaikh Ahmed Faruqi, a fanatical revivalist of Islam, had declared himself a 'qayum' or the deputy of God and Controller of the entire universe. Not to speak of his courtiers, the Emperor Jahangir himself¹ was not immune to his pernicious influence. Piqued by the reverence shown by the people at large to Guru Arjan Dev and the prestige which he was acquiring day by day, he denounced the Guru as 'Imam-e-Kufar'. He poisoned the mind of Jahangir when the latter put up at Sirhind on his way to Lahore by provocative allegations.

Jahangir lacked his father Akbar's regard, more his tolerance, for the feelings of the followers of other religions. A bigoted Muslim, he was overly anxious to win the favour of the orthodox priestly order (Ulema). He was painfully aware of the fact that lakhs of Hindus and, for that matter, numerous Muslims had been influenced by the benign spirituality preached by Guru Arjan Dev into joining his fold, and his popularity was spreading like wild fire. The idea of crushing this movement, started by Guru Nanak, down to its roots had been agitating his mind for quite some time and an excuse for translating it into action was provided by Chandu. Chandu succeeded in planting, through unscrupulous informers, the insinuation that Guru Arjan Dev had lent the Emperor's rebellious son, Khusro, all the possible moral support and had gone to the extent of applying a 'kesar tilak' to his forehead which constituted a blessing for the prince ascending the throne.

1 Akbar had died earlier on 17 October, 1605, Dr Hari Ram Gupta, *History of the Sikhs*, p. 147.

Khusro, pursued by Jahangir and his imperial army, had, no doubt, met Guru Arjan Dev at Tarn Taran to beg for his help and the Guru had provided him five thousand rupees by way of travelling expenses. This gesture had been motivated by the pitiable condition of Khusro as well as by the kindness shown to the Guru by Akbar, the grandfather of the prince. For him the application of 'tilak' symbolised courteous reception, traditionally accorded to visitors of high position, and had nothing to do with Khusro's claim to the crown.

The charge aforesaid, totally false as it was, could never be substantiated but Jahangir's deep malice against the house of Guru Nanak, aggravated by the backbiting resorted to by Faruqi and Chandu, served as ample proof for its acceptance and he ordered that the Guru be placed under arrest forthwith and tortured to death. In addition, a fine of rupees two lakh was imposed on him and all his properties were ordered to be confiscated. Jahangir did not have the time to supervise the execution of his diabolical command in person and it was left to Shaikh Farid Bukhari, leader of the orthodox Ulema (also referred to as Murtza Hussain Khan), the viceroy of Punjab, to carry it out.

Before proceeding to Lahore Guru Arjan Dev nominated Hargobind as his successor, and all the ceremonies and formalities sanctioned by custom were duly observed. He consoled his wife saying that the human frame is perishable, it should not, therefore, be cherished. She was advised not to mourn his death nor to end her life at her own will.

After Jahangir had proceeded to Kashmir, Guru Arjan's torments commenced. He was made to sit on a red hot plate of iron, and burning sand and boiling water was poured on his bare body causing copious excruciating blisters. His agony was unbearable, but the Guru neither groaned nor uttered a sigh. Mian Mir, an old friend and a faqir, possessed of mighty supernatural powers, was enraged by the sight of atrocities the Guru was going through and he sought Arjan Dev's permission to pray for the destruction of his persecutors. But the Guru told him that that was how God willed and His will must prevail. At last

the Guru expressed a desire to take a bath in the Ravi. His executioners readily agreed, because they thought the touch of ice-cold water would be felt by his limbs like undiluted acid. The Guru was walked to the river under a strong guard. He took a dip in the ferocious current and did not come out. His body too could not be traced. This happened on 30 May, 1606.

Guru Arjan Dev had refused to pay the fine because he pleaded that the funds at his disposal were meant for his Sangat (congregation) or the poor, needy persons, not for the coffers of the government. Moreover, he could not be subjected to such a punishment because he was no criminal. The amount remaining due after the auction sale of his properties was demanded later from his successor, Guru Hargobind, and on his failure to oblige, he was incarcerated in Gwalior for several years.

2

Teachings

THE LORD ALMIGHTY

God

Guru Arjan believed in one God, one author of the whole creation. According to him all living things were created out of five basic elements, Earth, Water, Fire, Air and Ether in different combinations and they were made active by the addition of 'Atam Tatt' or Divine Element (Energy). The process was common to the entire eighty-four lakh species, admitting no exception. In this perspective any plurality of religions, faiths, castes, etc. is inconceivable. There are innumerable universes, worlds and continents. Human beings inhabiting different regions of a world may have, due to the working of inexorable natural forces, different complexions, physiques and features but in essence their basic composition is the same. Therefore, no one can claim to be more closely related than any other to the sole parent of the entire progeny.

In the time of Guru Nanak, just as of now, Hinduism and Mohammendanism were the two predominant religions flourishing in India, each having crores of followers. Owing to his birth in a Khatri family, Guru Nanak was taken to be a Hindu but he declared categorically, 'Neither am I a Hindu nor a Muslim' and thus refused to recognize the division of humankind on narrow sectarian lines. Kabir, brought up as a weaver, was singularly blunt in challenging the superiority assumed by Brahmins on the score of birth alone. 'If you were nurtured by a better womb, why did you not adopt a different route for entering the world?' he asked¹.

1 Jau toon Brahman Brahmini Jaaya.
Tau aan baat kaahey naheen aaya.
(Rag Gauri, p. 324)

Guru Arjan took note of the divergence in religious practices followed by the two said communities. In spite of the Almighty God being admittedly one, they remember Him by different names and their styles of offering prayers to Him vary materially. The books they refer to for spiritual instruction are not the same nor are the places, they regard holy for purposes of pilgrimage, identical. Their conception of paradise may not be significantly dissimilar and yet they would give it their own individual names. Even the colours of the clothes they wear as a matter of ritual do not match. The Guru did not, however, pass any remarks about their respective practices and offered, instead, by way of the essence of the spiritual wisdom, the remark 'whosoever is deeply aware (pachhata) of the Lord's will or command to him, to him only, His secret is revealed'.

In his fifth Shabad in Rag Ramkali (p. 896)¹ Guru Arjan Dev refers, inter alia, to 'Khuda' whose greatness is beyond calculation, 'Allah' whose vastness and depth know no limits, 'Khaalik' the Originator of all creation, 'Jagan Nath' (Vishnu) the Universal Provider, 'Rishikesh', who governs senses and 'Mukand', the dispenser of emancipation. An orthodox Hindu would not like to utter 'Allah' lest his palate be soured, and a Mohammedan may be reluctant to touch a paper on which 'Vishnu' is written, even with a pair of tongs. The prejudice prevails despite the firm belief of the Muslims that each and every living being owes his existence, irrespective of the religion professed by him, to Allah

1 Kaaran Karan Kareem,
 Sarb Pratipaal Raheem.
 Allah Alakh Apaar,
 Khud Khudaaye Wad Besumaar.
 Ong namo Bhagwant Gusaaen,
 Khaalak raw rahiya sarab thaeen. Rahao.
 Jagan-Naath Jagjeewan Maadho,
 Bhau Bhanjan rid maanhe araadho.
 Rikhee Kes Gopaal Govind,
 Pooran Sarbattar Mukand.
 Meharwaan Maula toohec Ek,
 Peer paikaambar seikh.
 Dilaan ka Maalak karey haak,
 Kuran Kateb te paak.

the Great. In the same manner the functions of feeding and maintaining one and all without any distinction are discharged by 'vishnu', the Benevolent, according to the Hindus. Guru Arjan asserts with confidence that Allah and Paarbrehm (and they cover all names current among the two communities) are one and the same entity, because his Mentor has removed all his misconceptions on this point. The Guru adds: He the Lord of our hearts unconcerned with scriptures calls us from within ourselves.

Guru Arjan's God may be invisible, inaccessible, unknowable and yet He is very much committed to looking after His creation, His children wherever they might be. He would not contemplate escape in dense forests or dark mountainous caves or in the depths of fathomless oceans. He is present with the souls brought by Him into being, without any distinction of religion, caste, colour, region and possessions. The Guru makes this point beautifully in one of his hymns :

Sagal banaspati menh baisantar
 Sagal doodh menh gheea.
 Ooch Neech menh jot samaanee
 ghat ghat Maadho jeea.
 Santoh ghat ghat rahiya samaahiyo,
 Pooran poor rahiyo sarab menh
 Jal thal Ramalya aahiyo.

(Rag Sorath, p. 617)

(Just as fire is present in all kinds of vegetation and butter in all kinds of milk, the light of the Lord manifests itself in high and low. O fellow devotees, He pervades in every heart. He, the Perfect one, fills all beings; He is there in water as well as lands.)

When a baby goes to sleep, with its mother by its side, it would like to place one of its tiny legs on her leg and one of its arms in like manner on the upper part of her body to make certain that she does not leave the bed unnoticed. It believes she shall be there to protect it in any situation. A young son accompanying his father to a zoological garden holds his parent's finger firmly and by taking this precaution he assures himself that no danger

from any quarter shall assail him. There is a saying in Punjabi, "Kalli howey naan wanaan dey wich lakkree, kalla naan howey putt jatt daa", implying that it is plain bad luck for a farmer to be the only son of his father. This is because cultivation of land leads to conflicts with other local farmers quite often and occasions, therefore, arise when one brother (or more) needs be there to face the enemy. It is again a commonplace that sometimes a friend proves to be more loyal to one than a blood relation. Every body is not so fortunate as to have all the aforesaid sources of strength available, some might not be blessed with a single one of them. But no such unpleasant eventuality can occur in the case of persons like Guru Arjan Dev. He has his parents, brothers, friends all rolled into one entity, and that one, the Almighty, is there at his beck and call at all times. A picture of confidence, he shouts with joy:

You being my father, you yourself being my mother,
 You being my kin as well as my brother,
 You being my protector every where,
 Then how, dear one, can I be tormented by any fear?
 By your grace I have come to know what you are,
 You are my shelter, on you I do implicitly depend.
 Apart from you, there is none else,
 On the theatre (of existence) all play is Yours¹.
 (Rag Majh, p.103)

At another place he observes :

Aukhee gharee na dekhan deyee apna birad samaaley.
 Haath dey raakhay apne kau saas saas pratipaaley.

(Rag Dhanasri, p.682)

It signifies : Those whom He has accepted as his own are protected by His mighty arm and are looked after by

1 Toon mera pitā toon hain mera maata,
 Toon mera bandhap toon mera bharaata,
 Toon mera raakha sabhneen thaaen,
 Taan bhau keha kaara jeeo.
 Tumri kripa tey tudh pachhaanan,
 Toon merēe oāt toon hain mera maanan,
 Tujh bin dooja awar na koe,
 Sabh tera khel akhaara jeeo.

(Rag Majh, p. 103)

Pichhley augun bakhsh laye Prabhu aagay maarg
paaway.

(*Rag Sorath, p. 624*)

(Just as a child carried away by his baser instincts perpetrates innumerable blunders and the father after rebuking him harshly embraces him lovingly in the end and tenders him advice, similarly the Lord writes off His devotee's past errors and guides him to the right path for the future.)

Guru Arjan Dev is quite firm in believing that 'Khuda' is the support, the refuge, of those who have none else to fall back upon. He, the Benefactor of the Resourceless, is, therefore, the one to be cherished day and night : 'Since the Lord Himself has blessed me with His grace, I pray that Allah, my heart, my vital force, my soul, may not be absent from my thoughts any time¹. A few lines later he fondly remembers Sridhar (Vishnu), Mohan (Krishna), the Creator of all, Nirankar, the Bestower of Bliss. He says the man who forsakes Prabhu to offer obeisance elsewhere appears to be beguiled by pernicious sensual cravings². We are thus left in no doubt that, to Guru Arjan Dev, the names by which the Supreme Being is remembered or revered by various religious communities because of his countless attributes are freely interchangeable and that He is the only Peerless one.

Guru Arjan Dev accepts no dividing line between man and man drawn with reference to caste determined by birth or otherwise. The Guru, having been enlightened by his Satguru as to the Supreme Lord permeating every being down to his depths realises that no one is his enemy any

1 Needhriaan dhar paneh Khudaaye,
Garceb Niwaaaj din rain dhlaaye,
Nanak kau khud khasam meharvaan,
Alloh na wisray dil jeca praan.
(*Rag Bhairon, p. 1138*)

2 Sreedhar Mohan sagal upaawan
Nirankaar sukhdaata,
Aisa Prabh chhod kareh an sewa
Kawan bikhya ras maata.
(*Rag Bhairon, p. 1138*)

longer, so he does not harbour any ill-feelings towards any person. His friendship extends now to one and all and everybody holds him in affection¹.

Such large heartedness and breadth of vision are manifest throughout his work.

Fetters And Handcuffs

ATTACHMENTS

If a tree ever comes to entertain the idea of having a walk for better health or sheer pleasure, it would not be able to put that idea into practice because of its innumerable roots and sub-roots dug deep in the earth. In the same manner, we human beings, despite enjoying total freedom of action, cannot get away from the world, however much tired of it we may be for the simple reason that we are tied hand and foot by the chains of our attachments.

We have to take care of our aged parents who gave us birth, brought us up and helped us in settling down in appropriate careers. Likewise we are duty-bound to feed, clothe and educate our children who are flesh of our flesh and wholly dependent upon us. Apart from our responsibilities towards our kith and kin, we have to discharge legal, social, moral and emotional obligations to our village, town, state, country, nation, religion and caste. We have to safeguard our properties, inherited or acquired, and protect our image from stains and shadows. The saints tell us that the shackles forged by these attachments keep us tied to the wheel of transmigration resulting in endless journeys between the womb and the grave. Our dream of union with the Lord thus ends up in a mirage.

In order to realize God, the devotee has to place one offering at His feet, the offering of love, pure as well as

1 Na ko mera dusman rahiya.
Na ham kis key bairaaee.
Brahm pasaar pasaario bheetar,
Satgur tei sojhee paaee.
Sabh ko meet ham aapan keena.
Ham sabhnan key saajan.
(Rag Dhanasri, p.671)

whole. If he seeks fulfillment of worldly desires simultaneously, his love is not pure, and if it is shared with some other persons, objects or enjoyments, it is not whole. Riding two horses at the same time is not possible. The scheme of things as designed by the Creator is such that in case a man is haunted in his last moments by any unfulfilled desire, he shall have to come back to the world for the satisfaction of that desire. We may mention an instance or two as provided by Shri Trilochan, a well-known sage, in this connection. The man who is worrying about his progeny at the crucial time has to take birth as a sow, so that he can have children in abundance, and a man whose attention is concentrated on a house assumes the form of a ghost so that he can have the run of that building without any let or hindrance¹. In either case the thirst is quenched, but with a bitter taste in the mouth. The saints, therefore, advise giving up of all attachments with the world, this vale of tears, to enable the soul love its Lord single-mindedly.

As has been seen attachment to a person or object alone ensures holding a man captive by the cycle of births and deaths but he is also susceptible to pulls, operating from different directions, each potent enough to keep the soul bound to the world. Rama Krishna Paramhans used to mention 'kanchan' (gold) and 'kamini' (woman) in this context, but they were meant to serve only as symbols : 'kanchan' standing for numerous material possessions, including money which is capable of buying all necessities, comforts and luxuries, and 'kamini' representing various human relationships—father, mother, sons, daughters, friends, etc. Bharat, a great King from whom our country derives her name, gave up his kingdom and all the pomp and grandeur which went with it to devote himself to spiritual pursuits entirely. He shifted his abode to a river-

1 Ant kaal jo larikey simray,
 Alsee chinta menh jey maray,
 Sookar joni wal wal autray.
 Ant kaal jo mandir simray,
 alsee chinta menh jey maray,
 Pret joni wal wal autray.
 (Rag Gajari, p.526)

side grove, subsisted on wild fruits and roots and yet he had to revert to the world's quagmire because he had picked up an abandoned off-spring of a doe out of mercy and got attached to it too deeply.

The lion's share of our attention and care is however, focussed on our own person, our body. Its demands for delicious and nutritious food, expensive and beautiful clothes, decent accommodation suited to all weather conditions, etc. are rather frequent and too persistent to be ignored. Guru Arjan says that it is futile to pamper this mortal frame which has to be consigned one day or the other to the currents of a river, the flames of a pyre or the jaws of dogs. It is as ephemeral as a smoke-cloud. Yet deceived by its apparent soundness and solidity we come to believe that it is going to last for ever¹. A trader, a financier, a ruler, an ascetic, or a god, each one is carried away by Death, none can stay on².

It is to be borne in mind, Guru Arjan tells us, that a farmer must harvest the crop that he has sown at the appropriate time, irrespective of whether a particular plant has or has not fully ripened³. Just as night inevitably follows the day and day the night, death must bring to an end whatever takes birth. Absorbed in the gratification of senses man may forget that he is living in a house of sand,

-
- 1 Rey nar kaahey paporoh dehee,
Ood jaalgo dhoom baadro
Ikk bhaajoh Raam sanchee.
Teen sangia kar dehee keenee,
Jal kookar bhasmchee.
Hoey aamro greh menh baitha
Karn Kaaran bisrohee.

(Rag Sorath, p. 609)

- 2 Rehan na paaweh sur nar deva,
Ooth sidhaarey kar muni jan sewa.
.....
Baadshaah shaah waapaaree marna,
Jo deeseh so kaaleh kharna.

(Rag Suhi, pp. 739-40)

- 3 Jaisey Kirsaan boway kirsaanee,
Kaachee paakee baadh praanee.

(Rag Assa, p. 375)

which must collapse one day¹, or that his body is no more than a pitcher of unbaked clay, unclean by its very nature, and too much of concentration thereon leads to sin and chastisement at the hands of Yama².

When man's own material form parts company with his soul how can he bank upon the relatives he has in the present birth? Guru Arjan says:

We are tied to our sons, wife and other relations by Maya, our bonds with them are illusory and as such none of them will stand by us at the moment of final reckoning³.

One who invests his love in a wayfarer, ends up a loser. He neither earns profit nor gets his capital back⁴.

Blood relations and the rest are like beads, all independent of each other, but strung together in a rosary. When the weak untwisted thread joining them snaps they fall apart and become total strangers to each other. Obviously, dependence on the loyalty of such persons, mortals themselves, can result only in disappointment⁵.

It is futile for a man to have dominance over vast territories and even to have his writ run throughout the world. Firstly, the hunger for more extensive empires and more exalted positions must continue plaguing him. Secondly,

1 Balooa key greh bheetar bassay.
(*Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 267*)

2 Rakhch pochaar maatec kaa bhaanda,
Ati kuchhel milay jam daanda.
(*Rag Suhi, p. 741*)

3 Puttar kalattar lok greh banita
Maaya sanbandhehec.
Ant kee baar ko khara na hosec
Sabh mithya asnehec.
(*Rag Sorath, p. 609*)

4 Bataaoo seon jo laaway neh,
Ta ko haath na aawat keh.
(*Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 268*)

5 Anik bhaant kar maniyen saajey
Kaachay taag parohce.
Toot jaayego soot baapurey,
Phir paachhay pachhutohce.
(*Rag Sorath, p. 609*)

howsoever spectacular his achievements may seem today, they would not have even an iota of permanence. Costliest clothes, jewels, cosmetics and the likes thereof cannot afford any abiding happiness or satisfaction¹.

Love for Maya in its various forms for the sake of sensual pleasure proves sadly unenduring because the objects loved are transitory like the shade of a tree².

One should not be taken in by the appearances of things. Gourd which looks like a fruit, charms the eye, but being unconsumable due to its bitterness, it fetches no price³.

The wonderful spectacle which our treacherous world presents is like a flash of lightning, dazzling but momentary⁴.

Washing himself brings no cleanliness to an elephant because he splatters himself with dust again in no time. In the same way a man, despite all his phenomenal acquisitions, leaves this world stark naked just as he was born⁵. In spiritual terms he may even be worse off. The

- 1 Anik sugandhat tan menh laawo,
Oh sukh til samaan naheen pawo.
• • •
Bastar bibhookhan bahut bisekheh,
Oye bhee janoh kitay na lekhay.
Pat sobha ar maan mahatt
Aaglyaa kaari sagal jagat.
• • •
- Raaj milkh ar bahut phurmais
Man naheen dharaapay trisna nan jals.
(Rag Assa, p. 373)
- 2 Anik bhaant Maaya key het
Sarpar hovat jaan anet.
Birbh kee chhaaya seon rang laaway
Oh binsay oh man pachhtaaway.
(Rag Gaurī, Sukhnani, p. 268)
- 3 Pekhandro kee bhull ‘Tumma’ dissam sohna.
Adh na lehandro mull Nanak saath na jullace maaya.
(Rag Jaitsari, p. 708)
- 4 Daamnee chamatkaar
Teon wartaara jagg khey.
(Rag Gaurī, p. 319)
- 5 Naanga aaya naango jaasee
Jeon hastee khaak chhaanay.
(Rag Assa, p. 380)

world can be compared with a store house of mascara, one who steps into it cannot avoid getting blackened¹.

An octopus is equipped, for procurement of its food, with eight deadly tentacles. But due to the space in between these tentacles a lucky prey may give it the slip. In contrast Maya has a close-knit but widely spread net with a bait to allure the unwary victims. Whichever 'bird' impelled by desire, swallows that bait is sure to be trapped for good, with no chance of escape².

Each living being has a mind, and it is so constituted that it must cherish desires. These desires clamour for fulfillment, and if a few of them get satisfied some more take their place. Mind provides a very fertile ground for their birth as well as growth.

One desire which is common to all living beings is to squeeze as much pleasure out of life as possible. This never ending pursuit of pleasure is an arduous business and most often turns out counter-productive and acutely painful. It makes people run like stray dogs, from door to door, without achieving any appeasement of their hunger. Guru Arjan Dev refers to a typical case :

One is tempted to taste
Sensual pleasures laced with poison
Times without number,
Satisfaction continues, however, to elude him
And the effort itself
Tires him out, out of existence³.

There have been mighty kings and great landlords. They all fell victims to the lures of Maya and lost their perception of the ground realities with the result that their craving

-
- 1 Jeon kaajar bhar mander raakheo
Jo paisaay kaalookhee rey.
(Rag Dev Gandhari, p. 535)
 - 2 Maya jaal pasaarlya bheetar chog banaaye,
Trisna pankhee phaaslya nikas na paaye maaye.
(Sri Rag, p. 50)
 - 3 Anik bhog bikhia key karay
Nenh triptaaway khap khap maray.
(Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 279)

for more and more possessions remained as unquenched,
as ravenous, as ever¹.

Strings of pearls, gold, rubies, diamonds,
Wealth in any form that delights the heart,
One toils for them all one's life
Yet no contentment is ever achieved².

It is characteristic of material pleasure that whatever is
taken, believing it to be sweet, turns out to be bitter³.

Just as fuel fails to put the fire out, excess of worldly
pleasures never brings a feeling of fulfillment to anyone⁴.

The enjoyment that one has in a dream serves no pur-
pose. In the same manner gratification of one's desires
would not yield full satisfaction unless a sense of content-
ment is developed⁵.

It is no wonder, therefore, that Guru Arjan, (kindness
incarnate as he is) prays to our Creator, Omnipotent Lord,
to pull us, poor souls, out of the Blind Hole of our existence,
to save us from the interminable alternates of births and
deaths⁶.

1 Waddey waddey raajan ar bhooman
Ta kee trisan na boojhee.
Lapat rahey maaya rang maatey
Lochan kachhoo na soojhee.
(*Rag Dhanasri, p. 672*)

2 Mukti maal kanik laal heera
Man ranjan kee maaya,
Haa haa karat bihaanee awadheh
Man santokh na paaya.
(*Rag Jaitsari, p. 700*)

3 Mitha kar kay khaaya kaura upjia saad.
(*Sri Rag, p. 50*)

4 Bikhya menh kinhee tripat na payee.
Jeon paawak eendhan naheen dhraapay,
Bin Hari kahaan aghaaee.
(*Rag Dhanasri, p. 672*)

5 Bina santokh naheen kou raajay,
Supan manorath birthey sabh kaajay.
(*Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 279*)

6 Aridh bila tey kaadhoh kartey kia naheen ghar teray.
(*Rag Dev Gandhari, p. 530*)

The Call Divine

NAM

Guru Arjan preached that the best possible use to which our invaluable human form can be put is to concentrate on efforts for God's realization and the only means for the achievement of this object is meditation on the Lord's name.

Most of the people we come across are recognized by one name, viz. Sultan Singh, Kashmiri Lal. Not all, of course, some have more names, given by their dear ones as they advanced in age. But God's case is entirely different. That He is one, a single entity, is beyond any controversy and yet votaries of various religions have adopted for Him names of their own sweet choice and some times followers of the same religion even remember Him by different names. A well-known composition, 'Vishnu Sahansar Nam', as the title itself shows, attributes a thousand names to the Supreme Being. Guru Gobind Singh's 'Jaap Sahib' exceeds that number by a substantial margin. Coming to Guru Arjan himself, we find scores of his names listed in just one hymn starting with :

Achut Paarbrahm Parmeshar Antarjaamee.

Madhusoodan Daamodar Suaamee.

(*Rag Maru, p. 1082*)

And this list is in no way exhaustive, because in the very next hymn the Guru refers to Him as 'Allah' and 'Khuda' which he had not done earlier. He, however, makes it clear that his names which we speak of are all given by man whereas His real, true name, has been in existence from the very beginning, long before names like those enumerated by him were coined and came into circulation¹.

When making this distinction, he had in his mind, obviously the Name which no one other than the Almighty had thought out and given unto Himself. This is the Name about which Guru Nanak remarked :

1 Kirtam nam kathey terey jehba.

Sat Nam tera para poorbala.

(*Rag Maru, p.1083*)

He was His own creator.
It was He who authored the Name¹.
(*Rag Assa*, p. 463)

Man's life is short. Phenomenal developments in the field of medical care have improved his life-span considerably but even doubling the three score and ten years believed to have been assigned to him do not carry any significance (a lichen tree may defy death for 4500 years) in terms of eternity. If man himself is doomed to perish within a severely limited period, anything created by him cannot survive indefinitely. A particular name of God conceived and cherished by a community of his devotees may be remembered for a number of centuries or millenia but it must inevitably end up in oblivion. Kabir said :

Baawan Achhar lok trai sabh kachhu in hee manhe,
Ey akhhar khir jahengey oey akhhar in menh
naanhen.
(*Rag Gauri*, p. 340)

It means that whatever is to be found within the sphere of the three worlds can be reduced to writing with the help of 52 symbols of Dev Nagri script, and that which can thus be put in black and white must in its own time perish. But the Divine Name is beyond the reach of the said alphabet and is, therefore, immortal. According to Guru Nanak 'Name' is not only invisible to the eye, it cannot be grasped by any of the other senses either².

As per Guru Amar Das, in 'Kaliyug' Name operates under the cover of secrecy³ but, all the same, as Guru Arjan explains, it can be bestowed upon the seeker by a Perfect Master through his grace⁴.

1 Aapi nal aap sajeo aapi nal rachio Naun.
(*Rag Assa*, p. 463)

2 Adisht Agochar Nam apaara.
(*Rag Maru*, p. 1041)

3 Gupta Nam Wartay wich kalljug
(*Rag Prabhati*, p. 1334)

4 Poore gur te Nam pallay paaee.
(*Rag Basant*, p. 1175)

We human beings are plagued by numerous ailments of body and mind. Each disease originates from particular causes, can be diagnosed from its peculiar symptoms, and calls for specific treatment. A medicine sure to cure one disease may aggravate another to the extent of making it fatal. Because of their heterogeneous, some times conflicting characteristics, no one medicine can be expected to provide relief in all situations. However, Guru Arjan informs us, there is one such sovereign remedy as can rid the sufferer of all possible afflictions and that is Nam¹.

Naturally one cannot go to any way-side chemist's shop and buy this miraculous elixir. It is purchasable against no currency, soft or hard, howsoever sound. It is dispensed only to such a person as is blessed by the Lord's grace². As soon as Nam comes to abide in one's heart all his pains and sorrows instantly leave³. Once refuge of God's Name is secured one is not troubled by even a stray gust of hot wind⁴.

We go to a festival fair where various types of stalls are set up. Some present exhilarating sights, others provide fun and frolic, while still others offer mouth-watering delicacies. At some stalls exquisite articles are exhibited offering temptations too hard to resist. Moving around we are thrilled to meet some intimate friends, some likeable acquaintances. Chancing upon strangers with smiling faces and carefree gait too adds to our enjoyment of the moment. A time comes, however, when despite the fact that the fair remains as attractive and entertaining as before, we feel like leaving it and we do.

The world we are born to live in is also, we are told by our spiritual mentors, a fair of its own type. We come here

1 Sarb rog ka aukhadh Nam.
(*Rag Gauri*, p. 274)

2 Nam aukhadh soee jan paaway.
Kar Kirpa jis aap diwaaway.
(*Rag Gauri*, p. 179)

3 Hari Hari Nam ja kay hirdey wassay.
Dookh dard teh Nanak Nassay.
(*Rag Gauri*, p. 179)

4 Man merey gauh Hari Nam ka ohla.
Tujhay na lagay taata jhola.
(*Ibid.* p. 179)

for a predetermined period and at the end of it we are taken away by inexorable Death. In a number of cases the end is accidental, occasionally it is premature, but most of the time even an unbiased outsider would adjudge it as perfectly natural. And yet, strange as it may seem, nobody wants to say good bye to this juggler's show, be it a person who has, with all the necessary resources available, lived a full life, or one who has suffered tortures of an incurable cancer or irreversible paralysis, or virulent leprosy, and has lost hope of a single peaceful, much less pleasant, moment in future. When the kidneys have failed, the liver is out of action, the heart is sinking, the patient already in his eighties would cling to any pill, potion, or ampule like the proverbial straw, so that he can linger on for some years and, if that be too much, some months, or just some days more. This morbid, pitiable thinking results, *prima facie*, less from the dying person's attachment to the world, than from the terror of what might be lying in store for him on the other side of Death. To err is the common lot of human beings and commission of sins is not at all alien to their nature. Provisions of Yama's penal code being wholly shrouded in mystery, imagination has all the freedom to paint miseries awaiting the doomed soul in darkest colours. Even a person who would concede no form of existence after the last breath may shudder at facing the stark uncertainty of the sheer vacuum.

In this hopeless situation. Guru Arjan Dev comes out with remarkable comforting assurance :

On the route, miles whereof
 Are beyond counting,
 The Name of God shall serve
 As your provision.
 On the way where total darkness
 Renders you blind
 The Name of God shall be with you
 To light your steps.
 On the way where you are
 Acquainted to none,
 The Name of God shall be there
 To befriend you.
 Where there is terrible heat
 And scorching sunshine,

There the Name of God shall serve
 You with its protective shade.
 Where, O man, by thirst you are tormented,
 There, says Nanak, you shall
 Showers of God's nectar-Name receive¹.

(Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 264)

Dwelling upon the boons conferred by Name of the Almighty on His seeker, Guru Arjan tells us :

Where mother, father, sons, brothers, friends
 Are conspicuous by their absence,
 The Lord's Name shall give you
 Company and help.
 Where hardships at their bitterest
 Are your lot,
 By the Lord's Name you shall in an instant
 Be rescued.
 Whereas any number of acts expiatory
 Fail to save,
 Name of the Lord washes off
 Millions of sins.
 One who is destined to suffer
 Births and deaths uncounted,
 By meditation on the Name
 Abiding rest secures².

(Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 264)

-
- 1 Jih maarag key ganey jahey na kosa.
 Hari ka Nam oohaen sang tosa.
 Jih painday mahhan andh gubaara,
 Hari ka Nam sang ujjeaara.
 Jahaan panth tera ko na sinjaanoo.
 Hari ka Nam teh naal pachhaanoo.
 Jeh maha bhayaan tapat bahu ghaam.
 Teh Hari key Nam kee tum ooper chhaam.
 Jahaan trikha man tujh aakarkhay,
 Teh Nanak Hari Hari amrit barkhay.

(Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 264)

- 2 Jeh maat pita sut meet na bhaaee,
 Man oohaen Nam teray sang sahaaee.
 Jeh muskal howay ati bhaaree,
 Hari ko Nam khin manhe udhaaree.
 Anik punch charan karat naheen taray.
 Hari ko Nam kot paap parharay.
 Anik jon janmay mar jaam.
 Nam japat paway bisram.

(Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 264)

Not only this :

Parijat is the Almighty's Name,
Kamdhenu, singing the Lord's praise¹.

By way of summing up the second Ashtpadī, Guru Arjan says :

Nothing whatever measures
Up to the Name,
Some rare person receives it
Through the Master's grace².
(*Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 265*)

SHABAD

'Shabad' or Word is used to convey different meanings in different contexts. Shabad can be a piece of religious poetry, instruction imparted by a spiritual mentor, sound emanating from any source and even the Lord God. In Guru Arjan Dev's compositions, it signifies, most of the time, 'anhad shabad', i.e. ever ringing melody or 'Anhat' Shabad', Divine Music, which does not owe its origin to any one object striking against another. 'Anhad' and 'Anhat' are qualities of one and the same melody which is created by the Almighty Himself and reverberates in every living creature's heart.

The target before the seeker is meeting the Lord. The means available to him for hitting it is remembering the Almighty, devotedly, with affection. He is to be remembered time and again, persistently, so much so that the remembrance becomes an unbroken, non-stop process, resulting in His being present to the mind all the time, not forgotten at any moment, whether one is awake or asleep.

For remembering an ordinary person, we invoke the aid of our memory and recall occasions when something

1 Parjaat eh Hari ko Nam,
Kamdhenu Hari Hari gun gaam.
(*Ibid.*, p.265)

2 Nam tull kuchh awar na hoey,
Nanak Gurmukh Nam paaway jan koey.
(*Ibid.*, p.265)

pleasant, something sweet, occurred between him and us. It could be some heart-warming words exchanged in intimacy or some pregnant gesture communicating volumes. But in the case of the Supreme Being, the aspirant can fall back upon no past; there is no history. It is like crossing an uncharted desert. The only help conceivable, the sages tell us, is the repetition of His Name, attuning one-self to His word as advised by a True Master, a Master who knows Him.

The Saints have used 'Nam' (Name) and 'Shabad' (Divine Melody) as synonyms most of the time but where the context so requires a fine distinction is drawn between the two.

In the course of a long journey, by an aeroplane some distance, though very small, is covered on the runway and the rest through the skies. The aeroplane remains the same, but its taxing and flying differ markedly. Guru Arjan Dev clears the point in a few words, effectively :

Prabh kay simran Anhad jhunkaar.
(*Rag Gauri, p. 263*)

(When one continues meditating on the Lord's Name the Unstruck Melody becomes audible.)

Dwelling on the Name is an effort undertaken by the seeker. On the contrary, the Shabad becoming perceivable by his inner and finer faculty of hearing (Surat) is a matter of grace on the part of the Lord, the source of the Melody. The transition involves ripening of the Name-practice up to a particular level. Thereafter, the 'Nam' is by-passed and Shabad takes over. The Guru observes at another place :

Naam japat hoa pargaas.
Gur Shabaday keena riday niwaas.
(*Rag Prabhati, p. 1341*)

What is sought to be conveyed is that on persevering devotedly in Name-practice one begins to perceive the Divine Light and the Sound Current inside the heart and continues perceiving them onwards without break. The Shabad with its inherent qualities of music and luminance has all along been there, only the concerned individual

becomes conscious of it when he is initiated by a Master and dwells upon 'Nam' one-pointedly in accordance with his instructions.

Just as a lion's roar in the jungle provides conclusive proof of his presence, the ringing of Shabad in every being's heart reveals that the Lord is there. This unstruck melody of Shabad is His own voice¹.

The spot where the Unstruck Melody resounds is referred to by Guru Arjan Dev as the Tenth Door. Its arrival can be compared, in the absence of any thing really matching it, with the delicate dripping of Amrit or nectar, the immortality elixir².

Here is a word of the Guru's direct testimony on the point :

The Divine temple within me is illumined by the Word,
and there my Lord, Bliss Embodied, enjoys himself³.

We are told that the Lord resides within our body but He cannot be seen with the eyes which our faces bear. And yet His keeping Himself invisible is no inviolable rule. The mystery of His manifestation is unfolded by our author with the help of an apt metaphor:

When the moon appears on the horizon it is amenable to sight through its reflection in one and all the water-filled pitchers. The light of the Almighty is present in the same manner in all living beings, without any distinction. But it is revealed only to those who are favoured by Him in this behalf⁴.

1 Dar wajeh Anhad wajey Ram,
Ghat ghat Hari Gobind gaajey Ram.
(Rag Wadhans, p. 578)

2 · Anhad Shabad dasam dwaar wajjio
Teh Amrit Nam chuwaaya tha.
(Rag Maru, p. 1002)

3 Mandir meray Shabad ujaara,
Anad Binodee Khasam hamaara.
(Raag Assa, p.384)

4 Habb samaanee jot Jeon Jul ghataaoo chandrama,
Pargat thecaa aap Nanak mastak likhiya.
(Rag Maru, p.1099)

Although this Shabad is called 'Anhad', reverberating all the minutes of the hour, it cannot be heard at one's own will. Hearing it depends on the Satguru's assistance, his grace. That is why a Perfect Master, the go-between, the match-maker, must be approached to have the services of Shabad:

By the Perfect Master's grace Shabad reveals itself and brings about the aspirant's union with the Supreme Being¹.

Unique is the bliss which Anhad Shabad affords. It is verily a perfect boon conferred by a Perfect Master².

Shabad is said to be a jewel of incalculable value. Endowed with unlimited merit, it is, apart from being a treasure of bliss, a potent capital meant to be exploited for earning the fortune of a soul's salvation. Every precious article deserves to be protected by a lock. The Shabad too cannot be had without seeking assistance from a Saint, the keeper of the key³.

So long as the mind is not at ease and its attention is not focussed at one crucial point, the practice of Surat-Shabad pays no dividends. But when the soul's special faculty for capturing the Divine music reverberating at the eye centre gets completely absorbed in the said music, the Truth Embodied, the Lord Himself becomes visible. That is what happened in Guru Arjan Dev's own case⁴.

It may well be borne in mind that after initiation there is a three stage journey to the goal, i.e. the union with the

1 Satgur poora bhetecay Shabad milaawanhaar.
(*Rag Sorath, p.639*)

4 Anhad Shabad achraj bismaad,
Gur poora poora parsaad.
(*Rag Bhairon, p.1143*)

3 Keertan nirmolak heera,
Aanand gunee gaheera.
Anhad baanee poonjee,
Santan hath raakhee koonjee.
(*Rag Ramkali, p.893*)

4 Nanak Dass Hari Kirtan raata
Shabad surat Sach saakhee.
(*Rag Sarang, p.1227*)

Almighty – getting rid of the passions, self-realization and merging into the Shabad¹.

Since 'Anhad Shabad' is produced by the Lord without striking one object against another, it cannot be equated with the sound of any of the worldly instruments. However, on account of the innumerable variations in the notes of this Shabad, it may resemble the music of some such instrument upto a degree. Keeping the Bhagtias (a sect of Hindus), who sing hymns to the accompaniment of dancing, in view, Guru Arjan Dev says that the worship of a real devotee is performed all within himself. It comprises washing the mind clean, curbing the ego, subjugating the five passions, concentrating on the Almighty, and listening to the Divine Melody ringing in his heart like the music of rebecks, drums, cymbals, bells, etc. That is the only dancing acceptable to the Lord, the only singing He would appreciate².

Shabad, the Divine Melody, though emanating from the Supreme Being Himself, is mentioned at places as Guru's Word because the technique of realizing it can be learnt only from a True Master. For instance, says Guru Arjan :

Since the Guru's word manifest became
It saved my honour in all respects³.

A man is rid of the darkness inside him when the Guru's Word manifests itself as a lighted lamp⁴.

1 Aap pachhaanch Sabad march
manonh taj vikaar.

(Rag Assa, p. 430)

2 Uddam karat howay man nirmal naachay aap niwaarey,
Panch Jannan ley wasgat raakhay man menh Ekanikaarey.
Tera jan nirat karey gun gaaway,
Rabaab pakhaawaj taal ghungroo Anhad Shabad wajaaway.
(Rag Assa, p.381)

3 Gur ka Shabad bhayo saakhee,
Tin saglee laaj raakhee.

(Rag Sorath, p.623)

4 Andhkaar mitio teh tan tey Gur Shabad deepak pargaasa.
(Rag Gauri, p.208)

It is the Benevolent Lord Himself who wills and manages a devotee's meeting Him. He dwells on the Guru's Shabad and is in the process fulfilled¹.

Sharing with the readers his own experience, Guru Arjan Dev states that when he realised the Master's word all his objects were completely achieved and his wishes entirely fulfilled².

When meditating on the Lord through the means of Unstruck Melody, the individual soul becomes one with the Supreme Being, the ultimate of bliss is attained³.

The Guide Supreme

THE MASTER

The path leading to the release of a soul from its earthly cage and its ultimate assimilation in its source, the Almighty God, as preached by the Saints of Guru Nanak's line is commonly called Gurnat or Sant Mat. The reason for its being so termed is the pivotal role which the Sant Satguru or True Master plays in the realisation of the said goal.

The process starts with the Supreme Being in His grace willing that a particular person has had enough of this world and its torments and may now be brought back. When so pleased, He arranges the concerned person's getting in touch with a Satguru. Though the seeker comes to believe, innocently, that his own efforts are responsible for his joining the Master's fold, the reality is otherwise. It is like the game of blind-man's buff where the player with his sight fully functional gets himself caught, rather than the one with bandaged eyes cornering him. The Guru brings the suffering soul to his 'sangat' (society) and awakens his

1 Aapey mel laye kirpaal,
Gur ka shabad jap bhaye nihaal.
(Rag Gauri, p.282)

2 Gur ka Shabad ridey menh cheena,
Sagal manorath pooran aaseena.
(Rag Bilawal, p.804)

3 Jotee Jot milee sukh paaya.
(Rag Majh, p.97)

dormant longing for Union with the Lord to the pitch where the separation becomes insufferable. He initiates the seeker to the practice of meditation on the Divine Name (The Word), keeps his protegee's toddling feet steady on the track, safe from the pits and pot-holes along the way and carries him (the seeker) on his own shoulders where the terrain is impossible to cross otherwise. Initiation, aforesaid, means a firm commitment on the part of the Satguru to guide and help his disciple, despite his flaws and frailties, to the cherished success, which means taking him to 'Sachkhand', the abode of the Lord, and making him one with Him.

A person desirous of visiting some country, other than his own, needs documents like a passport, visa, or entry permit. For rendering him assistance in contacting the concerned authorities travel agencies are there not only in big cities, but in small towns too, and some of them, with reasonable standing, can be trusted for fair dealings. Likewise, there is no dearth of 'mystics', attractively attired, claiming impressive spiritual achievements and top-class proficiency in bringing about union with the Lord, but swelling their ranks there are also any number of shameless tricksters out to make easy money at the cost of gullible aspirants. Guru Nanak asserts with all the force at his command that 'None has realized the Supreme Being without the grace of a Satguru¹, and what a saint of his stature states cannot be shrugged off lightly.

A crucial question arises how to identify a 'True Master', because at stake is not an amount of money small or big but the devotee's invaluable, irretrievable life-span. Confronted with the issue, Guru Arjan Dev offers a dependable criterion. He says :

Sat Purukh Jinhi jaanian
Satgur tis ka nao.

-
- 1 Eh neesance saadh kee
 Jis bhetat tareey.
 Jam kankar ner naan aawee
 Phir bahur na mariay.

(Rag Gauri, Var, p. 320)

- 2 Bin Satgur kinay na payeo bin
 Satgur kinay na paaya.

(Rag Assa, Var, p. 466)

Tis kay sang sikh udhray
Nanak Hari gun gao.

(*Rag Gauri, Sukhmant, p. 286*)

(One who has come to know the Supreme Being
is called Satguru.)

The 'knowing' spoken of by him is not in the sense of a formal or superficial acquaintance. It is the 'knowing' that is acquired through the loss of an individual's identity, his merger in the Lord outright, so as to become indistinguishably one with Him. Devoted remembrance of the Almighty in the company of such a personage (Satguru) culminates in the emancipation of the devotee.

Relevant to the aforesaid issue is another test suggested by the author:

A distinctive feature of the Saint it is
Whoever sees him is saved.
Yamraj's minions visit him not,
Nor does his death occur.

(*Rag Gauri, Var, p. 320*)

The Satguru puts the seeker on the Path, and proceeding thereon the seeker does not have to face the executioners of Yamraj nor suffer births and deaths any more.

We have already seen what awe-inspiring powers the Lord God wields. In view of their vastness He is described as Omnipotent. But when we ponder over the following verse of Guru Arjan Dev doubts about the infiniteness of the Almighty's authority begin to raise their heads :

No one can the charming Lord's will dominate,
And yet He does only what the Saints may please.
They make Him act the way they desire,
At His mansion none dare them oppose¹.

(*Rag Maru, p. 1076*)

1 Rooro Thakur kitay wass na aaway
Hari so kicch karey
Jo Hari kiyān Santān bhaaway.
Keeta loran soee karaayan
Dar pher na koe payenda.
(*Rag Maru, p. 1076*)

It is observed by him at another place:

The Guru's glory defies all description,
He is the Ocean of Discrimination and Truth.
In existence ever, even before Time,
He is the Supreme Being in His peerless
perfection¹.

The boons received by one who seeks shelter at the feet of the Satguru are large in number and immeasurable in merit.

Parijaat tree and Kaamdhenu cow, both of mythical origin, are believed to be capable of fulfilling any wish, any day. Some one may desire owning one or the other for easy access and immediate results. However, being things of another world, they are impossible to acquire. But Guru Arjan Dev has a recipe for a person nurturing such a lofty ambition. He suggests :

Pining if you are my dear, for Parijaat,
Or to see glamorous Kamdhenu at your door,
Service of a Perfect Master you do join,
And dwell on his bounteous Name.
With contentment you will surely be rewarded,
And satisfaction to the full enjoy².

It is stated in books that no less than a massive collective effort on the part of gods and demons both could snatch the afore-mentioned tree and cow from the entrails of a boundless ocean and that the lure of their possession led to bloody fights amongst some mighty warriors. How come a human being, referred to as a Perfect Master, should be in possession of all the miraculous powers attributed to the said extra-ordinary entities ? Such a question may suggest itself to many of the readers of the said 'shloka',

1 Gur kee mehmas kya kahaan
Gur bibek satsar.
Oh aadi jugaadee jugeh jug
Poora Parameshar.

(Rag Assa, p. 397)

2 Paarjaat loreh man plaarey,
Kaamdhenu sohee darbaarey.
Tripat santokh sewa Gur poorey.
Naam kamaayes resaena.

(Rag Maru, p. 1078)

or of some other 'shloka' to a like effect. An explanation is there in the fifth 'solha' of Guru Arjan Dev just two pages earlier:

A servant (man) of the Almighty
Is same as the Almighty Himself,
Human form does not any difference make.
It is like a wave arising from the ocean
To varying heights
And in the Water
Getting ultimately merged¹.

(Rag Maru, p. 1076)

When one's mind is aflame with anger, envy, etc. the Guru restores its cool as if by the application of sandal paste².

It is believed that the very touch of the philosopher's stone turns a base metal like iron into gold. But the Guru's contact works a still greater wonder. A man corroded by his evil tendencies to such a state of worthlessness as iron-rust, on receiving his shelter, is transformed into a thing of immense value³.

A man enjoying the protection of his spiritual mentor attains eternal life by stepping out of the cycle of births and deaths⁴.

Souls were created by God aeons ago. They continue suffering pangs of separation, entangled in the cycle of transmigration and infinitism till a Preceptor exhibiting unbounded kindness performs the rescuing act. Guru Arjan refers to this stroke of luck in Rag Majh at page 102:

1 Hari kaa sewak so Hari jehaa,
Bhed na janoh maanas deha.
Jeon jal tarang uthah bahu bhaatee,
Phir salalay salal samaayenda.
(Rag. Maru, p.1076)

2 Balto jalto taunkia Gur chandan seetlayo.
(Rag Gauri, p.241)

3 Satgur kee Jey sarnae aaway phir manooronh kanchan hoha.
(Rag Ramkali, Var, p.960)

4 Nanak Gur samaagatee maray na aaway jaaye.
(Sri Rag, p.53)

By Satguru's grace, after births and more births,
The soul with its source is ultimately united,
Like a bone-dried tree sprouting back to life¹.

The Lord is said to be unknowable, unfathomable, inaccessible but not so in all cases. There are exceptions. We have the testimony of Guru Arjan Dev himself on the point based on his personal experience available from as authentic a source as Guru Granth Sahib :

Beyond the reach of the Vedas,
The Books, the world and the rest,
Nanak's King Divine,
Is to sight manifest².

(Rag Assa, p. 397)

Again :

See what a marvel has taken place,
The Lord, who it is said defies comprehension,
In my own heart
Has the Master revealed³.

(Rag Sorath, p. 612)

It is stated further :

When the Saint turned my mind away
From the pleasures this world affords,
I did see Him, the Bliss Embodied⁴.

(Rag Sarang, p. 1205)

Man's eyes are perhaps his most active sense organ and because of their compulsive penchant for all that is for-

1 Janam Janam kaa vichhuria millia.
Saadh kripa tey sooka hariya.

(Rag Majh, p. 102)

2 Bed, Kateb, sansaar habhaahoon baahra.
Nanak ka paatshaho disseh jaahra.

(Rag Assa, p. 397)

3 Dekhoh achraj bhaya.
Jeh Thakur ko sunat agaadh bodh
So riday Gur daya.

(Rag Sorath, p. 612)

4 Dekhio drist Sarab Mangal Roop ulti Sant karaaye.

(Rag Sarang, p. 1205)

bidden, the load of sins, accumulated in consequence of the role of agents provocateur played by them, is the heaviest. They see and see and yet are stark blind in respect of what is really worth seeing, the Supreme Being, the Beloved of the soul. Guru Arjan observes :

Nanak, different are the eyes
To which my Dear One is visible¹.
(*Rag Maru, Var, p. 1100*)

Living in this world amounts to suffering endless confinement in a torture chamber. The rich and poor, strong and weak, young and old, white and black, visited by their peculiar afflictions, all groan alike with pain without exception. And such is the spell of delusion cast on them by Kaal, the Negative Force, that they never awaken to the reality of their plight and the desirability of seeking some route of escape. In this hopeless, unenviable situation the only ray of hope emanates from the Satguru :

One is ferried across the world,
This Ocean of fire,
Vast and unfathomably deep,
By the Guru, Treasure of Compassion².
(*Rag Assa, p. 377*)

Wisdom lies in giving up reliance on the mind's fallacious reasoning and the intellect's fruitless acrobatics. Instead, implicit faith should be reposed in the Master and the instruction imparted by him at the time of initiation. The man who adopts this course can be recognized as enjoying the Almighty's grace³.

It is not the seeker's wisdom or foresight that takes him to the Master :

1 Nanak sey akhreeaan biann
Jinhan disando maa piree.
(*Maru Var, p. 1100*)

2 Mahaan agaah agni ka saagar.
Gur bohith tarey ratnaagar.
(*Rag Assa, p. 377*)

3 Sadhoo kee man ot gauh ukhti siaanap tyaag.
Gur deekhia jeh man bassay Nanak mastak bhaag.
(*Rag Gauri, p. 260*)

For the one who in this respect is by the Lord destined,
Only he a refuge with the saint seeks¹.

Whoever enjoys Satguru's grace finds his doubts, illusions, fears and mundane attachments cut off. Any desire which he addresses to the Saint fructifies and he ceases to be dependent on any one other than the said benefactor, in any respect².

Gains of a person who has been taken by a Sant Satguru under his wing are of great amplitude. Guru Arjan says that if he is maimed in leg he may scale mountains, if a dullard he may function as an accomplished orator and if bereft of sight he may scan all the three worlds. His mind is washed clean of evil tendencies and his accumulated sins, even though running into myriads, are wiped off³.

With a view to facilitating His realization by the prospective devotees, the Supreme Being has set up His abode in each and every heart and still no one can meet Him at his own initiative. Pious deeds like recitation of scriptures, undergoing austerities, bathing in holy waters, feeding the needy, do not take any one a single step closer to the Lord. The reason :

1 Jaa kay mastak karam Prabhe paye,
Sadh saran Nanak tey aaye.
(Rag Gauri, p. 296)

2 Maaya moh bharam bhau kaatay
Sant saran jo aaway.
Jeha manorath kar aaraadhey
So santan tey paaway.
Jan kee mehama ketak barnon
Jo Prabh apney bhaaney.
Kauh Nanak jin Satgur bhetliya
Sey sabh tey bhaye nikaaney.
(Rag Suhi, p. 748)

3 Pingul parbat paar parey
Khal chatur bakeeta.
Andhuley tribhavan soojhia
Gur bheth puneeta.
Mehma Saadhu sang kee
Sunoh merey meeta.
Mail khoee kot agh harey
Nirmal bhaye cheeta.

(Rag Bilawal, p. 809)

His house God Almighty has put under lock,
And key thereof to the Master entrusted.
For getting the key Satguru must be propitiated,
No other effort shall the least avail¹.

(Rag Gauri, p. 205)

Again :

Union with Damodar the Lord Gracious,
Through the Guru only can be achieved.
Other stratagems are all futile².

(Rag Majh, p. 98)

Guru and the Karma Liabilities

As we have seen the 'Nam' bestowed on the disciple is just a 'grain' out of the 'Bhandaar', a huge store-house, placed by the Lord with the Saint to be dispensed at his discretion. But it operates like a tiny seed of banana tree capable of acquiring vast dimensions. The grain aforesaid is utilized by the devotee as his capital and it characteristically grows into a fabulous fortune. In the context Guru Arjan remarks:

Such was the nature of the capital
To me by the Saint provided,
That all my worries and apprehensions
(with my karma debts concerned)
Were dissipated.
What has now Dharam Raay
With me to do,
When all the debit entries
Of my account with him
Have to pieces been shredded³.

(Rag Sorath, p. 614)

-
- 1 Jis ka greh tin deea taala kunjee Gur saunpae.
Anik upaav karey naheen paaway bin Satgur sarnaayee.
(Rag Gauri, p. 205)
 - 2 Dyal Daamodar Gurmukh paaeeay
Horat kitay na bhaatee jeeo.
(Rag Majh, p. 98)
 - 3 Santan mo kau poonjee saunpee tau uttria man kaa dhokha.
Dharam Raay ab kahaan karaigo jau phaatio saglo lekha.
(Rag, Sorath, p. 614)

For suggesting some measure of the value of the Guru's Word it is usually compared with a precious jewel, a jewel because, stones fetch a better price in the market than costly metals. But jewels are available at many shops and even if the price is high, bought they can be. As against that, the 'Word' is on sale at no shop-counter, it is given away by the Lord's treasurer, the Master, and that too without consideration. According to Guru Arjan:

Guru is the Giver, who bestows the 'Word',
No where on Earth the like of him can be found.
What a unique gift, what a matchless donor¹.

The Name or Word of the Almighty which is had from the Mentor as a gift, Guru Arjan Dev advises, should be contemplated all the time, every moment, because it stays with man, not only in this world but after death too. It becomes his soul's inseparable mate and serves as his impregnable shield here, there, everywhere. It does not sink in water, flames cannot consume it, no thief can pick and take it away. Manifold are its uses. It is riches for the indigent, staff for the sight-less, and mother's milk for an infant².

The Nectar of Nam (Word) is so precious and at the same time so efficacious that it need not be taken by glassfuls, even by thimblefuls, only a minimum would suffice. Once it touches the tongue, the question of death becomes irrelevant :

1 Gur bin dooja naaheen thaaon.
Gur daata Gur deway naaon.
(Rag Assa, p. 387)

2 Simrô simar simar sukh pawo,
Saas saas samaaley.
Eh lok parlok sang sahaaee,
Jat kat mohey rakhwaaley.
Gur ka bachan basay jee naaley.
Jal naheen doobay taskar naheen leway,
Bhaahey na saakay jaaley Rahao.
Nirdhan kau dhan andhley kau tik.
Maat doodh jaisey baaley.
Saagar menh bohith paaiyo Hari, 'Nanak'
Kari kripa kirpaaley.
(Rag Dhanasari, p. 679)

A drop of ambrosia (Nam)
The Guru gave me to taste,
Life eternal it is going to ensure
No Death, no more¹.

A grain of Nam can bring about emancipation not only of one aspirant but of crores of them².

Like the Master the Word too is perfect. Whosoever enshrines it (Word) in his heart realizes the Truth³.

The 'Word', which the Perfect Master bestows on his follower by way of initiation, is imperishable and unfailing in effect. Even his glance is like nectar, which, when cast on the seeker imbues him with the noble qualities of a Saint⁴.

No Hurdles and Checks on the Path

Guru Arjan Dev observes :

Followers of the Guru are honoured at the Lord's
court,
He Himself folds them in His embrace.
The Entrance is illumined for their convenience,
Their march to the destination no obstruction
meets⁵.

A saying goes, 'a friend in need is a friend indeed'. He may help you with money when you are in financial straits,

1 Ek boond Gur Amrit decno
Taan atall amar na mooa.

(Rag Sorath, p. 612)

2 Gurmukh kot udhaarda bhaaee they naaway ek kane.

(Rag Sorath, p. 608)

3 Pooray Gur kee pooree deekhiya.
Jis man bassay tis saach preekhiya.

(Rag Gauri, p. 293)

4 Poora Gur akhio jaaka mantra,
Amrit drist pekhey hoey Sant.

(Rag Gauri, p. 287)

5 Gurmukh dargeh manniah,
Hari aap laye gal laaye.
Gurmukhaan non panth pargata,
Dar thaak na koe paaye.

(Sri Rag, p. 42)

pull for you effective wires when your service career is in jeopardy, rush to your rescue when enemies are persecuting you mercilessly, stay by your bed when you are in the grip of a critical illness. Guru Nanak had, however, a different touchstone for testing a friend's real worth. He said:

Friends are those who keep me company
When this world I bid adieu,
And who my side will not leave
Subjected to Reckoning where I am¹.

Guru Arjan sets exactly the same standard for his own friends. It is :

O, Nanak snap your links
With fair-weather friends
And seek such Saints
As are fast in fidelity.
The first mentioned may desert you
Even when you are alive.
The others shall not forsake
After you have breathed your last².

Guru Arjan has unflinching faith in his Preceptor. Once the Guru owns a seeker, there is no letting him down:

Sacrifice am I to my Master True.
He abandons me not, save me he must³.
(*Rag Gauri, p. 186*)

The Moral Dimension

Guru Nanak Dev remarked in Rag Suhl that a pot is first washed clean, exposed to the rays of the sun for a

1 Sajjan seyee naal main
Chaldiaan naal chalann.
Jithay lekha manglay
Tithay kharey disann.

(*Rag Suhl, p. 729*)

2 Nanak kachrian seon tor
Dhoond sajjan Sant pakkia;
Oye Jeewandey vichhureh
Oye moyaana na jaahee chhor.

3 Satgur apney kau balhaaray.
Chhod na jace sarpar taaray.

(*Rag Gauri, p. 186*)

while and then put to use for collecting milk therein¹. What he meant to convey for our benefit was that our mind must be cleansed of its impurities, and its hankering after sensual gratification stopped, only then we can make progress on the spiritual path.

It is understandable that so long as a patient of diabetes continues with his reckless consumption of sugar, in one form or another, no tablet or injection will ameliorate his condition, much less cure his trouble. Guru Arjan Dev has, through the medium of his different compositions, charted a course of conduct for those who would devote themselves to the realization of self and thence to union with the Almighty. Unless they amend the pattern of their day to day living suitably, he warns, it will not be possible to meditate on God, and even if the practice is persisted with, the fruits will not be edifying.

He does not propose that to ensure for oneself a future endowed with lasting bliss and lasting future the present in this world must be refashioned on the lines of hell. If the guidance of a True Master, is secured and followed, says Nanak, the seeker perfects his way of life and:

Well-clad, well-fed and otherwise cheerful,
A reprieve from births and deaths he attains².
(*Rag Gajri*, p. 522)

There is not enough space in the human heart for accommodating Mammon side by side with the Supreme Being. Therefore, multiple allurements of the said Negative Power should not be allowed to blind one's eyes. Let us see what Guru Arjan has to say on the subject:

Good and attractive is that hut
Where eulogies of the Lord are sung,
Of no use are the palaces bright

1 Bhaanda dhoey bais dhoop devoh
Tau doodhay kau jaawoh.

(*Rag Suhi*, p. 728)

2 Nanak Satgur bhetlay pooree howay jugat.
Hasandlaan khelandlaan pehnandlaan khaawandlaan
Wichey howay mukat.

(*Rag Gajri*, p. 522)

Living wherein is the Lord forgotten.
 Bliss is in poverty which in the company
 Of a Saint, remembering the Lord God is suffered.
 Consigned to flames be that greatness
 Which in the net of Maaya enmeshes.
 Grinding grain, covered by a sheet coarse.
 One may experience joy of contentment.
 Devoid of worth is any such kingdom
 Satiates not which the craving for more.
 Honour comes to him who wanders unclad,
 Absorbed in love of the One Almighty.
 In vain are such apparels of silk
 Wearing whereof to them one enslaves¹.

(Rag Suhi, p. 745)

Salvation is a gift which only the Lord can grant. On whom he confers it, lies within His sweet discretion. Anyone who desires it must work for it sincerely and devotedly. The Almighty is All-Knowing, on Him no ruse can be played. An attempt to cheat may succeed against some ignorant or unwary folk, not against Him. Guru Arjan gives us a glimpse of people who are doomed to fail:

In form, no doubt, he is of human species,
 His deeds, however, match those of a beast.
 His days and nights he spends in impressing
 People, with all that is not true.
 His exterior would show he's a man of God,
 Inside he is drenched with Maaya's filth,
 Hide which he cannot, try however hard he might.
 By appearance he is learned, in meditation immersed,
 By ablutions cleaned,
 Inside him lurks the dog of Greed

1 Bhalee suhaawee chhaapree ja menh gun gaaye.
 Kit hee kaam na dhaulhar jit Hari bisraaye, Rahao.
 Anad gareebee saadh sang jit Prabh chit aye,
 Jal jao eh badpana Maaya laptaye. (1.)

Peesan pees odh kaamreee sukh man santokhaaye,
 Also raaj na kitay kaaj jit nenh triptaaye. (2.)

Nagan phirat rang Ek kay oh sobha paaye,
 Paat patambar birthia jeh rach lobhaaye.
 (Rag Suhi, p. 745)

(With hunger unquenchable).
 He smears himself with ashes
 (Grey, for a show of humility)
 But his core is aflame (with envy and anger).
 How can he swim across the ocean
 With all those stones tied round his neck¹.

(*Gauri Sukhmani*, p. 267)

Sins are all bad, but two of them are condemned by Guru Arjan Dev with special emphasis. He says that anyone who indulges in extra-marital sex has to suffer ignominy, and the one, who makes depriving others of their money or assets his profession, gets exposed despite all the precautions he may take to cover up his depredations².

The Guru has a marvellous talent for saying a lot in the minimum possible words. Confronted with the question, what are the best things for an aspirant to do, he comes out with the answer :

'Do only that which does not stain your mind with the dirt of sin but on the contrary, awakens, and keeps you awake, to the Lord's Melody³.

It should be plain to the poorest intelligence that following the suggested course would make the disciple scrupulously avoid undesirable actions and commend to him all that ennobles and elevates the soul.

-
- 1 Kartoot pashoo kee maanas jaat,
 Lok pachaara karay din raat.
 Baahar bhekh antar mal Maaya,
 Chhapas nanhey kachhu karay chhupaaya.
 Baahar glaan dhiaan isnaan,
 Antar biaapay lobh suaan.
 Antar agni baahar tan suaah,
 Gal paathar kaisey taray athaah.

(*Gauri Sukhmani*, p. 267)

- 2 Par triya raawan jahay sayee taan laajeeah,
 Nit Pratee hirat par darab chhiddar kat dhaakeeah.

(*Phunhey*, p. 1362)

- 3 So kichh kar jit mail na laagay,
 Hari keertan menh eh man jaagay.

(*Rag Gauri*, p. 199)

In Rag Gauri itself the Guru further states: depend upon no man, his support will prove futile. Bank upon the Lord only because what he blesses you with will bring you fulfillment. He being the sole Provider as well as Saviour, will protect you against any possible harm if you concentrate on Him. Keep your mind engrossed in praising the Almighty, your tongue busy drinking the Nectar of Nam, your eyes beholding the Lord's wonders, your feet moving on the path leading to Him, your hands transacting such business as is dear to Him and your ears listening to the Lord's Gospel. Stay in the company of Saints, none else, let righteousness inspire your dealings and submit to the will of the Supreme Being¹.

Guru Arjan accords prime importance to humility on the part of an aspirant. His word of advice on the point as recorded in one of his 'shabads' in Rag Ramkali (p. 883) is:

If you want to rise, serve the Lord by behaving as if you were lying under the feet of all as earth does and consider every other human being as your superior. Adoption of such an attitude will entitle you to experience bliss at the court of the Almighty. Give up making baseless representations to deceive the world, and stop disparaging others on the score of their uttering falsehood. This way you will attain a unique state of poise. Take it as a fact that God is close to you and is ever present (within you and within all others). On Your acquiring such a perception, no one may come to harm at your hands.

1 Maanukh kee tek brithi sabh Jaan,
 Dewan kau ekay Bhagwaan.
 Jis kay decay rahay aghaaye,
 Bahur na trisnaa laagay aaye.
 Maaray raakhay eko aap,
 Maanukh kay kichhu naaheen haath.
 Tis ka hukam boojh sukh hoeye,
 Tis ka Nam rakh kanth proye.
 Simar simar simar Prabh soye,
 Nanak bighan na laagay koye.

(Rag Gauri, Sukhmani, p. 281)

Talking ill of others is one of the most popular pastimes in all social circles, learned or un-lettered. By pulling another's leg one feels going a step or two higher at the cost of his victim as if by underscoring the latter's misdeeds one's own are wholly erased or at least pushed under the carpet.

But according to the Saints, mud-slinging is a very expensive sport. Your throwing filth (supposedly) on others has in reality the effect of washing their stains and dirtying yourself, proportionately, if not more.

What happens to a calumniator, at the final reckoning, Guru Arjan Dev relates:

Slanderer in pain shrieks and walls,
Having forgotten the Lord Almighty,
For his deeds such reward he receives.
Even he who would keep his company
Is along with him dragged down.
Mighty loads, all wholly unwanted,
The slanderer makes himself carry
And, to boot, gets by fire consumed¹.
(*Rag Assa, p. 373*)

The end of a slanderer is fall, fall like a wall of sand².

In Guru Arjan's scheme of God-realization, killing of living beings is strictly prohibited, and consumption of non-vegetarian food positively barred. His disapproval in this regard is expressed in no mistakable terms :

People of the World,
Addicted to eating carrion,

1 Arraaway billaaway nindak,
Parbraham Parmeshar bisraya
Apna keeta paaway nindak.
Jey koyee us ka sangee howay
Naaley laye sidhaaway:
Unhonda ajar bhaar uthaye
Nindak agnee mahen jalaaway.
(*Rag Assa, p. 373*)

2 Nindak aisey hee jhar parceay.
Eh neesaanee sunoh tum bhaayee
Jeon kaalar bheet gireeay.
(*Rag Bilawal, p. 823*)

Blinded by greed,
 The Almighty have forsaken.
 They kill what is forbidden,
 They partake of carcasses,
 They are as bad as goblins,
 They are no better than beasts¹.

Consulting an astrologer to ascertain auspiciousness of time for launching a project, performing some important ceremony like betrothal or marriage, shifting to a new house, proceeding on a journey etc. was quite common in the days of Guru Arjan Dev and, though scientific knowledge has made unprecedented strides in the meantime, the pernicious sway of superstition even on the minds of highly educated persons has not weakened till today. Top most leaders of our society (all spheres of life included) are seen sitting at the feet of these 'star-gazers' day in and day out, and the fees or offerings received by them total up to millions. Guru Arjan Dev would like us to steer clear of the whole of this humbug. According to him all months and days are auspicious for those who are favoured by the Lord with His grace². Therefore, it is He who should be approached for guidance and help in any situation.

Likewise, good and bad omens had no meaning for the Guru. He said only those people bother about them from whose minds the Almighty is away³.

Playing any game, with success as the aim, calls for serious thinking and adroit planning. Living a life is no exception to this rule. How he himself proceeded in this matter, Guru Arjan describes in Rag Assa :

1 Duneeraan murdaar khurdnee
 Gaafal hawaaye.
 Gaibaan haiwaan haraam kushtnee
 Murdaar bakhoraaye.

(Rag Talang, p.723)

2 Maah diwas moorat bhaley
 Jis kau nadar karey.

(Rag Majh, p.136)

3 Sagun apsagun tis kau laggeh
 Jis cheet na aaway.

(Rag Assa, p. 401)

I gambled away (my horde of) lust, anger, love of wealth, conceit and envy in the company of Saints, and brought home, on the other hand, (the jackpot of) virtue, contentment, compassion, righteousness and Truth. In this process my mind was purified and I began perceiving the Lord as pervading all, and regarding myself as dust under everybody's feet. As a consequence, my loads of births and deaths were cast off and, thanks to the Perfect Master, I was saved, saved in no time¹.

Universality of Approach

In the background of what has already been said with regard to Guru Arjan Dev's concept of God, and the equality of all human beings in the matter of their relationship with the Supreme Being, their creator, any more dilating on the subject is hardly called for. At one place he observed:

Nanak ka Prabh soey jis ka sabh koey.
Sarab rahiya bharpoor sachha Sachch soey.
(Rag Aasa, p. 398)

(Nanak's God is He to whom every one belongs.
He, the True and Eternal, permeates all without exception.)

Again :

Sajjan mainda chaaeeya habh kaheeda mitt.
Habhey jaanan aapna kahee na thaahey chitt.

(Rag Marik, p. 1096)

1 Kaam krodh maaya mad matsar
Ey khelat sabh jooay haarey,
Sat santokh daya dharam sach
Eh apnay greh bheetar waarey.
Janam maran chookey sabh bhaarey.
Milat sang bhayo man nirmal
Gur pooray lay khin menh taarey. Rahao.
Sabh kee rain hoye rahay manooaan
Sagley deeseh meet piaarey.
Sabh madhey rawia mera Thakur
Daan det sabh jee samarey.

(Rag Assa, p. 379)

(My beloved is full of verve, He befriends all. Everybody recognizes Him as his own, He hurts the feelings of none.)

The path for the redemption of His progeny that He has charted, i.e., meditation on Name, too does not make any distinction between man and man. No division on the score of caste finds a place in his dispensations. Guru Arjan Dev states with firm conviction:

Khatri Brahman Sood Vais sabh Ekay Nam taraanath.
(*Rag Maru, p. 1001*)

(Same is the Name (Word) which leads to every seeker's emancipation, irrespective of whether he is a Brahmin, Kshatri, Vaish or Shudra.)

Guru Arjan Dev thus leaves no room for doubt that his mission was to attain release for all souls, that took shelter with him, from the cycle of births and deaths. The religion which the seeker professed or the caste which his parents gave him, bothered him (the Guru) the least. He exhibited equal zeal in putting Muslims, Hindus and the rest on the right track for God realization. In his poem beginning with the words "Varat na rahon na meh Ramdaana" (*Rag Bhairon, p. 1136*) he declares, "Ek Gosain Allah mera" (To me Gosain and Allah are one) and "Alleh Ram key pind praan (My body and soul belong to Allah Ram.) Born in a Khatri Sodhi family as he was, had he nurtured any bias against the followers of Prophet Mohammad, it would not have been possible for him to deliver long discourses for their benefit like the following one:

O, you the man of God¹, the Inaccessible Allah,
Give up bothering about matters mundane.
Cast yourself in the mould of a mendicant wayfarer,
Humble like dust, treaded upon by all.
Only such a man of God is approved
For admittance to His mansion. (1)

Let Truth be your prayer²,

1 Khuda

2 Namaaz

and Faith the prayer-mat¹,
 Decimate desires, get rid of hopes,
 Constitute your body as your mosque.
 Commission your mind to serve as the priest²,
 And your unblemished purity
 To function as the Lord's Word³. (2)

Practising the Almighty's Name
 Should be the Code of Conduct⁴,
 Detachment and searching within
 The renunciation⁵ required.
 Acquiring sway over the mind
 Is wisdom Divine⁶,
 And Realising Truth⁷ is meeting the Lord Almighty.
 And this way escaping unending deaths. (3)

Practise Quran and other scriptures
 Inside the heart
 And hold back the ten senses
 From sinful ways.
 Tie down the five evil-mongers
 With the cord of Faith,
 Also espouse charity and contentment
 to qualify for Divine approval. (4)

Deem compassion a pilgrimage to Mecca,
 And utter humility as the prescribed fast⁸.
 Living by the letter of the Master's Word
 Should be the paradise of your dreams.
 Seek pleasure, light, fragrance,
 Only in the Lord.
 Make contemplating God your retreat to the cloister. (5)

-
- 1 Musalla
 - 2 Mulla
 - 3 Kalma
 - 4 Shareeat
 - 5 Tareeqat
 - 6 Maarfat
 - 7 Haqeeqat
 - 8 Roza

Gazi is one who practises Truth,
A real Haji he who purifies his heart.
The man who casts off evil
Is recognized as Mulla,
Who makes eulogizing the Lord his life's support
As true Darvesh. (6)

Consider all times auspicious
For the prayers.
The Creator, the Lord, should ever be
Present to your mind.
Let elimination of the ten sense temptations
Your rosary be,
And vanquishing lust your circumcision. (7)

Clear it should be to your mind
Whatever is visible would not last,
Family, home, brotherhood all,
Only snares of attachment are.
Rulers, chiefs, nobles must perish,
Only the Almighty's abode is eternal. (8)

Paying grateful homage to the Lord
In the first place,
The state of contentment next,
Humility third, then charitable disposition,
Further, keeping the five passions
At tight leash,
These qualities cherish as of towering merit. (9)

Perceiving the Lord's Image in all,
Should be your constant laudation¹,
And shunning deeds evil your prayer-pot².
By realising oneness of the Almighty
Give a call for the prayers
And being a dutiful progeny of the Lord
You your trumpet³ blow. (10)

Sustain yourself only on
What has been honestly earned

1 Maudeesa

2 Kooza

3 Burgoo

Wash the filth of your heart
By giving it the vastness of a river,
Who realizes the Master, paradise attains,
Him Izraael shall not consign to Hell. (11)

Cherish pious deeds instead of the body
And make Faith your soul's mate,
Seek joy only in such entertainments
As your godliness dictates.
Purification of the polluted mind
Should be the Code revered,
Your untarnished self the symbol of honour
Rather than the turban on your pate. (12)

A Muslim is one who is tender of heart,
The man who has purged himself
Of the internal impurities,
Who stays unaffected by worldly allurements
And is pure
Like flowers, milk, butter, deer-skin. (13)

Whosoever is blessed with His grace
By the Benevolent Lord generously,
Only he is to be reckoned
As the man amongst men.
He is the Sheikh of Sheikhs,
The genuine Haji,
Who has found favour with the Almighty. (14)

If one sees the Creator
Permeating His creation
And recognizes the Benevolent as the only Doer,
Deep in love with Him
Sings the praises of the Infinite Merciful,
And submits to the will of the Lord
Just and Eternal,
His, says Nanak, bonds are broken
And he swims the Ocean of Existence
Across to freedom.

(Rag Maru, p. 1083)

Guru Arjan Dev had a few words of advice for the Pandit too.

So far as the Hindus are concerned, the Brahmin or the Pandit laid the law for all walks of life that really mattered. He had chosen to designate himself as head of the communal body; the rest of the humans, divided into three classes, Kshatrias, Vaishyas and Shudras were left to constitute the trunk, the legs and the feet thereof respectively. To study, to cogitate, to determine, to instruct were considered to be the functions of the highest order and the Brahmin appropriated them to himself exclusively; to fight enemies on the battle-field for the protection of the society, to grow crops for its sustenance, to carry on commerce in articles of day to day use, to do lowly jobs like iron-mongering, carpentry, stitching of clothes, disposal of carcasses, scavenging, etc. were foisted on people doomed to inferiority by the accident of their birth. From entering the world to departing therefrom (as a matter of fact even after death) the whole span of a person's life was regulated at every stage by innumerable rites and ceremonies, confabulated meticulously, which were required to be performed by or under the supervision of the family purohit. By-passing any of the rituals ordained by him or any infraction thereof, intentional or inadvertent, was calculated to invoke dire consequences, from condemnation by the brotherhood here to incarceration in hell by Dharam Raj, the Judge of Karmas.

It was given out with authority that the Supreme Being resided in temples, in the form of idols installed therein with rigorous formality, and His worship could be performed in accordance with the inviolable directions of the priest, a Brahmin. The privilege of praying in temples was extended to the three higher classes only. The Shudras were taken as embodiments of such filth as tended to contaminate even a sanctum sanctorum, their entry into the temples was, therefore, strictly prohibited. Since they were not allowed even to touch a book bearing on spiritual issues, there were no avenues of salvation open to them. The Pandit wielded the power acquired by him over the centuries, cleverly and ruthlessly.

Guru Arjan addresses himself to the question, how to identify a 'Pandit'; and comes out with a clear-cut answer

as to who is one (a pandit) and who is not, in Rag Ramkali (p.887) in the following manner:

He is given to reproducing from memory texts like Vedas, dilating on their meanings too, but he has not grasped their essence; his mind lacks poise due to the agitation seething within. His heart is totally alien to the Almighty; no love of the Lord is reflected in the pattern of life lived by him and he does not in the least practice what he preaches with much vehemence.

He places before himself the idol of a god, he puts a saffron mark on its forehead, bows at its feet, but the whole proceeding is meant only to please his clientele, to hoodwink unwary folks. He does not put his heart in the said ritual, his mind continues to wander in the ten directions all the time.

He performs the six pious deeds enjoined upon Brahmins to satisfy the letter of the Code, he cleans his entrails in the hard Yogic way, his posture is perfect, and yet he is *given to visiting affluent homes to read out holy verses* lured by the remuneration offered, and he tells on his rosary, with purely mercenary motives. No one adopting such means, the Guru says, has ever achieved salvation.

A Pandit is, it is explained in the lines that follow, one who has freed himself from Maaya, as manifest in its three attributes; one who has come to realise that the Lord's Name contains all the merit sought to be attained from the perusal of the Vedas and one who accordingly devotes himself to the practice of the Word (Name) as instructed by the Master. Guru Arjan concludes by saying that he would seek shelter at the feet of such a Pandit.

The Guru reverts to the subject in Rag Gond (p.960) and remarks that the so-called Pandit is referred to as such because of his multifaceted knowledge of worldly matters, but the core of his self is stone hard like a degenerate grain passing off as 'moth' (a variety of lentils). His mind is boggled by desires and doubts, so much so that he cannot have a moment of peace. *He should know that an easily made buck gets wasted equally easily* but he hankers after money ceaselessly. Because he himself is a trickster, he relishes the company of the five malcontents (lust,

wrath, etc.), birds of his own feather. But if he seeks refuge with a Master, who bears ill-feeling towards none and is kind to good and bad alike, he (the Master) would turn him, a rust-eaten piece of iron, into pure gold.

The harsh words used by the Guru for the Brahmin may not be very palatable to him but they are meant to serve as a medicine with sure curative effect for the various tradition-bred misconceptions afflicting him.

Vaishnavs are a well known sect of Hindus. Devotees of Lord Vishnu, they worship Ram and Krishna, his incarnations, with a lot of zeal. Usually they sing praises of the said deities while dancing and presenting pertinent incidents of their lives on the stage.

Guru Arjan Dev comes across one such Vaishnav and finds time to counsel him what to do, so that the Lord be pleased:

Act in such a way that your mind does not get tarnished and your soul keeps awake attuned to the Divine Melody. You have to meditate on the Almighty God in the company of Saints and not to spare a thought for anybody else. Let dwelling on the Supreme Being be your pious deeds, rites, rituals, fasts and worship, all, because whosoever bestows his love on the Lord whole-heartedly sees his labours bear fruit without fail. One who treads the holy path in the manner suggested, avoiding pitfalls of sensual pleasures, may rightfully be called a true Vaishnav.

Guru Arjan has something to say about another section of Godmen who are referred to as 'asparas' for the reason that they consider themselves purer than other run of the mill human beings. They do not allow their bodies to be touched by any outsider, even a Brahmin. According to the Guru, a real 'asparas' is one who does not permit any falsehood to pollute his tongue, whose eyes do not cast a lustful glance at another's spouse, who would not listen to anyone being talked ill of, who disciplines his mind so as not to be attracted by sensual pleasures and who has no truck with any of the five evil tendencies. An 'asparas' who enshrines the Name (Word) in his heart, perceives the Lord as permeating every living being and whose head is bowed by way of reverence to the Almighty all the time,

he may prove to be a saviour for all who come in contact with him.

In the same way he addresses 'Bhagavtis', 'Ramdassas' 'Dhoorats', 'Dhurandhars', 'Basundhars', etc. who endeavour to please the Supreme Being with their own specific brand of religious practices. What he means to say is that though people segregate themselves, out of sheer ignorance, into narrow airtight compartments in the name of religion, sect, creed and caste yet the fact remains that they are all creatures of one God who pervades them in equal measure. He advises that the Universal Creator should, therefore, be recognized as their sole object of selfless worship, and the relationship between themselves should be marked by sincere love and affection.

In this perspective, it was all but natural that when the Guru observed the travails of the entire humankind struggling helplessly in the ocean of misery, this world, he raised his hands in prayer for the redemption of all:

You Saviour of the fallen ones,
Treasure of Compassion, Lord Benevolent,
Sustainer of all,
Provide your seekers the prop of your Name,
And break their rigorous chains.
Prays Nanak, O Lord of the Universe,
Dispenser of grace to the helpless,
Extend your merciful hand,
And save them from perdition¹.

(Rag Bihagra, p. 546)

1 Patit Udhaaran saran Soami Kripa Nidhi Dyaala,
Andh koop tey udhar kartey sagal ghat pratipaala.
Saran teri kat maha beriikk Naam deh adhaara,
Binwant Nanak kar dey raakho Gobind Deen Dyaara.

3

Artist Par Excellence

Literary Artist

There is no denying the fact that form in poetry has its own value and an appreciable one too. It makes the poem more pleasant to read, it enhances the impact of what is conveyed, and it helps the composition stick to memory. A man has to apply his mind to decide clothes of what cut and colour will go with his personality. A poet, likewise, has to be concerned about the words in which his thought or feeling is to be couched, and the arrangement which will be most congenial to those words. The content of Guru Arjan Dev's poetry and his expression are in ideal harmony with each other.

Verse Forms

I may not go to the extent of saying that Guru Arjan Dev has made use of all the metres known to Indian prosody, but a large number of them that were popular at the time and could serve the ends of his expression best are to be found in his writings. Lesser people have followed the dictates of the said code rigidly and in consequence amputated vital limbs of their poems, but the Guru certainly knew better. To him prosody was just a hand-maid, not a strait-jacket. As such he never sacrificed the clarity of his idea, the vibrance of his emotion, or the lyricality of his note to make his verse conform strictly to the rule of a particular metre.

Guru Arjan fulfills the requirements of the rule to a dot when it so pleases his Muse, but when it wills otherwise ample liberties are taken with it. The end result, in every case, is a superfine product. He does not create a line that jars on the ear, or is aesthetically deficient on any other count.

Now, sizewise, 'solha' is one of the largest verse forms found in the Holy Granth. As its name itself reveals, it comprises sixteen verse-units (stanzas) each carrying two short lines and the third a longer one. In one of his moods Guru Arjan Dev took up the task of remembering the Lord by various names current among His Hindu devotees, but when on completion of the usual forty-eight lines he felt the job had not been done adequately, he extended the verse form to twenty-one units. In the very next 'solha', his twelfth, which is composed as a piece of advice for the votaries of Islam, fifteen verse units were considered to be enough.

As if to show that sheer technicalities of prosody constituted no shackles for his fancy, his fourth 'solha' offers only twenty-seven lines in spite of the fact that the subject here is 'Guru', the Spiritual Mentor, upon which he has dwelt upon the most.

Guru Arjan Dev is a superb artist one comes to recognize many a time when going through his prodigious volume of writing, but for want of space we can only touch the subject here briefly.

The long poem at page 1155 is Guru Arjan Dev's second Ashtpadī in Rag Bhairon. Each verse in this octet has four lines. The first three lines of each of the first seven verses begin with the words 'Jis Naam ridey' (this sub clause constitutes one half of the line) and enumerate the various merits of meditation on 'Nam', whereas the fourth one, paints the fate of the unfortunate person who forsakes the Word, in lucid colours. The way the poem is designed, and the method of comparison and contrast adopted therein add a great deal to its appeal.

In the 'Chhant' (lyric) under Rag Bhairon (page 1122), the third line of the verse at times commences with the concluding words of the second line with telling effect. It is so in the first verse (Santan sang jaata) and again in the fourth one (naheen dokh bichaarey).

Guru Arjan Dev's felicity of expression is so consummate that he can make the briefest possible lines (comprising just two words) carry his most profound ideas without any difficulty. For instance:

Dootan Sangareea,
 Bhuyangam basareea.
 Anik upareea,
 Taaui main Hari Hari Kareea,
 Taaui sukh sahjareea.
 (*Rag Bihagra, p. 537*)

(I stayed in the company of the Evil Ones: Lust, Anger, Greed, Attachment and Conceit. It was no better than living amongst snakes. I tried a number of means, but they could not be shaken off. However, when I meditated on the Lord's Word I was blessed with a feeling of undisturbed, delightful peace.)

He can at the same time, take on longish and exacting verse forms of the class of 'sawaiya' with equal ease:

Rey man moos bilaan menh garbat,
 Kartab karat mahaan mughna.
 Sampat dol jhol sang jhoolat
 Maaya magan bhramat ghughna.
 Sut banita saajan sukh bandhap
 Taa seon moh badheo su ghana.

 Mirt manjaar pasaar mukh nirkhat
 Bhunchat bhugati bhookh bhukhna.
 (*Sawaiye Sri Mukhbakya, p. 1387*)

(O, you mouse of a man ensconced in a hole, you are bursting with pride, and indulge in actions which are most foolish Seated in the swing of wealth, you rollick with pleasure. Engrossed in illusion, you roam like an owl. You are thrilled by the love of your sons, spouse, friends and kin, and your days are spent in accumulating sins. The cat of Death is eyeing you with its mouth open, while you devour and devour and yet stay unsatiated.)

Whereas the verses of the foregoing variety move with the speed and force of a waterfall, those like the one quoted below flow smoothly, gently in the manner of a delicately controlled trickle of olive oil:

Taap paap tey raakhey aap,
Seetal bhaye gur charnee laagey,
Ram Nam hirdey menh jaap.
(*Rag Bilawal, p. 825*)

(When we get attached to the Lord's feet
And dwell upon his holy Name,
He affords us protection from all ills
And from evil temptations saves.)

The following quotation will bear testimony to the sophistication of his verse's rhythm mentioned above as well as furnish an illustration of the economy of words which is characteristic of his style:

Aisee kirpa mohey karoh,
Santeh charan hamaaro maatha
Nain daras tan dhoor paroh.
(*Rag Bilawal, p. 828*)

(Lord, please oblige me so, that my forehead
touches the Saints' feet, my eyes behold his holy
face and my body is smeared with the dust of his
feet).

Language

Guru Arjan Dev was born and brought up in the Punjab. It was, therefore, natural for him to express himself in Punjabi. On account of his being a Spiritual Mentor, his contacts spread far beyond the confines of his ancestral region. Consequently, we find words of various dialects of this language like Multani, Lehndi, Poorbi, Malwai in his compositions. Even Sindhi is there quite conspicuously. Rajasthani and Haryanvi too deserve a mention.

Some of his compositions are loaded with Sanskrit words, in original form (Tatsam) or the altered form (Prakrit, Apabharansh). In some others Persian and Arabic terms predominate. The main body of his writing, however, is in a language which has been termed 'Saadh Bhaasha' or 'Hindvi'. It is an admixture of Hindi and Punjabi, Hindi enjoying an advantage over Punjabi at places and vice versa, in accordance with the congregation sought to be addressed.

When a point was to be made at a mainly intellectual level, with the priestly class or some otherwise knowledgeable section in view, he would employ typical terminology figuring in the prominent religious books pertaining to that circle, and yet he did not fail to bring in his staple vocabulary (mix of Hindi and Punjabi) so that his readers in general were not wholly deprived of the instructions being imparted in that particular context.

There are six 'vars' composed by Guru Arjan Dev which are included in the Granth Sahib. They are cast in Rags Gauri, Gujri, Jaitsari, Ramkali and Basant. Except for the one mentioned last, these 'Vars' follow a common pattern in the matter of metre, each unit comprising two 'shloks' (three in Rag Maru) and a 'Pauri'. The 'var' in Rag Jaitsari is similar to the other said 'vars' as to the texture of the stanzas, but it is a class by itself in respect of the language used. In the first part of the 'shlok' component a particular idea is expressed in Saadh Bhaasha, widely current in Northern India's religious circles, whereas the other part employs, for saying the same thing, Lehandi, the dialect prevalent in Western Punjab. So far as 'pauris' are concerned a third alternative has been adopted, i.e. the language used here is standard Punjabi, the language of Central Punjab. Its multilingual character enabled this 'var' to enjoy circulation in comparatively far more extensive regions.

Imagery

The vastness of territories from which Guru Arjan draws his images is staggering. Goindwal, his birth place and where his childhood years were spent, was surrounded by agricultural farms, and Amritsar, which came to be his permanent abode, had developed into a fair-sized town. He grew up in the company of a spiritual mentor and assumed office as one himself even before he had entered his twenties. Not only was he born a genius, he had also drunk deep from the springs of religious and spiritual knowledge. His vocation brought him in touch with followers and seekers from various walks of life and provided occasions for exchange of ideas with scholars, saints and faqirs hailing from different regions. It is, therefore, no surprise that

his writings sparkle with images of infinite variety and are endowed with charming beauty and lasting effect.

Because his message was meant to be conveyed to people at all social and intellectual levels, he did not consider it below his dignity to use such symbols as were widely popular, viz 'rain-bird' to demonstrate intensity of desire, or 'philosopher's stone' to give an idea of a saints' power to elevate his followers. We come across the words 'nabh' and 'pir', or 'dhan' and 'kaaman' (kaamini) in his writings frequently because everybody knew at the time that in spiritual parlance husband stood for the Supreme Being, and wife for the soul. The Guru employed these stock terms, I may repeat, consciously so that he could be understood by one and all and, even where he gave free reign to his creative genius for the embellishment of his compositions with richer imagery, he took pains to stay close to the realities of day to day life for easy comprehension.

Guru Arjan never cultivated land with his own hands, as Guru Nanak Dev did, but he assumed the role of a farmer quite often to drive a message home. At one place he says :

Teray hukmain saawan aiya.
Main sat ka hal joaaya.
Naaon beejan lagga aas kar
Hari bohal bakhsh jamaay jeo.
(Sri Rag, p. 73)

(When Your Will, My Lord, brought in the season of rains (a state of mind conducive to cultivation of the Supreme Being) I plied the plough of pure living and sowed the seed of meditation on Your Name with the hope that I would harvest a rich crop of Your grace).

It is stated again :

Jaisey dhartee saadhay bahu bidhi
Bin beejay naheen jaamain.
Ram Nam bin mukat na hoee hai
Tutay naaheen abhimaanain.
(Rag Sarang, p. 1205)

(Just as soil prepared by various processes like ploughing, removal of weeds, enrichment with manures, etc., does not yield any crop till the requisite seed is planted, emancipation cannot be achieved, nor conceit uprooted, without the practice of the Lord's Name.)

These days certain public companies, banks and the like patronise teams of players for encouragement of sports. In olden times Rajas and Nawabs used to espouse such causes. Guru Arjan Dev explores the field of sports in search of his image and declares with a sense of pride:

Haun Gosain da pehalwaanra,
Main gur mil uch dumaalra.
(Sri Raq, p. 74)

(I am a wrestler of the Lord of Earth, and wear my prestigious 'dumaala', turban of honour, because of my having been victorious with the grace of my Master.)

In Rag Bhairon (p.1136) he speaks of his foray in deer hunting and his capture of ten does (sense organs) and bagging of five bucks (evil passions) with self-discipline as the mount and his Master's Word as the unfailing weapon. He had no use for a horse, sword or spear¹.

When there were no trains or trucks, different types of merchandise used to be transported by groups of merchants with the help of pack animals like camels, donkeys etc. The Guru extracts a beautiful metaphor from this commercial activity when he observes:

Muthrey sayee saath
Jinheen sach naan laddiya.
(Raq Gauri p. 319)

(Plundered were those caravans which did not care
to load the Truth.)

1 Das mirgee sehjey bandh aanee.
Paanch mirag bedhey Siv kee baanee.
Sant sang ley charhio sikaar.
Mrig pakrey bin ghor hathekaar.
(*Raq Bhairon, p. 1136*)

His knowledge of the trade circles is exploited again in the following couplet :

Rey moorhey laahey kau toon dheela dheela
Totey kau beg dhaaya.
Sast wakhar toon ghinain naaheen
Paapeen baadha renaaya.

(Rag Assa, p. 402)

(O, fool, the deals with profit potential you fail to clinch due to rank laziness and those you pursue with extreme haste bring you losses only. The goods you can have for much less than their real worth you do not acquire, and by repeated commission of sins you continue sinking deeper and deeper into debts.)

How does a man totally forgetful of the Creator waste his lifetime ? Here is the answer:

Saakat kee aawarda jaaye brithaaree.
Jaisey haagad key bhaar moosa took gawaawat,
Kaam naheen gaawaaree.

(Rag Dhanasri, p. 681)

(The days of a Mammon-worshipper are spent fruitlessly, just as loads of paper nibbled to pieces by a foolish mouse bring no gain.)

Guru Arjan could not possibly ignore nature, a glimpse where-of was ambrosia for his eyes due to its irresistible beauty, and even more because his Beloved God impregnated every particle thereof.

The phenomenon of an individual soul getting united with its Divine source is not for every one to describe. Only some rare Guru Arjan Dev can put it into words :

Sooraj kiran miley jal ka jal hooa Ram.
Jotee jot ralee sampooran theea Ram.

(Rag Bilawal, p. 846)

(Like the merger of one of its rays into the Sun or the water (of a river) into the water (of the Ocean) my light has mingled with the Supreme

Light and my fulfillment I have achieved.) In 'Gauri ki var' at page 319, he observes:

Chiree chuhkee pauh phuttee
Waggaan bahut tarang.
Acharaj roop santan rachey
Nanak naameh rang.

(The sparrows have started chirrupping, the dawn has broken, wave after wave of breeze is blowing. Attuned to the Nam in a state of ecstasy, what a unique sight the Saints present.)

And thus in one single couplet he paints a beautiful word picture transporting one to a refreshing landscape, imparting bliss to the hearts yearning for union with the Beloved.

When he talks of 'Anhad Shabad' like:

Jhim jhim warsay Amrit dhaara.
(*Rag Majh, p. 102*)

(With a sing song sound the stream of ambrosia falls.) the sweet music of the Divine nectar dripping in an adept's consciousness becomes distinctly audible.

To evaluate the merit of a mind in love with the Lord read the following lines:

Khakhreeaan suhaaweeaan laggreeaan akk kanth.
Bireh vichhora Dhanee seon Nanak sahsay ganth.
(*Var Gajari, p. 319*)

The 'akk' fruit looks charming so long as it is attached to the plant. Separated therefrom, it is torn into thousands of shreds.)

Have you ever been a witness to a troupe of words dancing out of joy, with sheer abandon? We may have recourse for an instance to Guru Arjan Dev's treasure-house of poetry :

Ando Anad ghana main so Prabh deetha Ram.
Chakhiara chakhiara main Hari ras meetha Ram.
(*Rag Assa, p. 452*)

(Bliss, what a marvel of bliss I experienced on beholding the Lord. Taste, O what a taste I had of inherent sweetness of the Almighty.)

When the time comes to reap the harvest the farmer gathers all the plants whether they are ripe, partly ripe or even green. Similarly, Death does not care about the age of the person destined to shed his mortal frame. (Haree naaheen neh dadduri pakki wadhanhaar. Sri Rag, p.43). The world is a morass of attachment (Pankaj moh sar haan. Rag Assa, p.409). People are so engrossed in worldly pursuits that they cannot stop for a breath, like a bullock yoked to an oil press. (Aath pehar mahaan sram paaya jaisey birkh jantee jot. *Rag Kedara*, p.1121). The Word is to a seeker what his staff is to a blind man (Amrit Priya Ka Nam main andhaley tohinee. *Rag Bilawal*, p.847). When a devotee unites with the Lord, he loses his identity just as foam is dissolved in a wave of water. (Jeon jal tarang phen jal hoee haty sewak Thakur bhaye eka. *Rag Sarang*, p.1209).

Rhyme

In Guru Arjan Dev's time anything laying claim to being a poem had to be rhymed. There is no wonder, therefore, that he subjected himself to traditional discipline in this respect. But he did not simply comply with the letter of the common law, he executed the job with remarkable finesse; he carried it to perfection. Citing of examples is not at all necessary, because any one of his hymns picked up at random would establish the point. And yet one is tempted to refer to a verse or two to show what unique craftsmanship was at his command when to all intents and purposes he was functioning as a whole-time Sant Satguru concerned with the liberation of souls rotting in the quagmire of this world.

In the matter of its constructional rigidity what sonnet is in the English verse forms 'Tribhangee' is in the Indian one. It comprises four lines and each line consists of four sections. The first three sections of every line rhyme with each other, not the fourth one, which seeks its companions in the fourth section of the other lines. The rhyme scheme adopted is thus : a a a e, b b b e, c c c e, d d d e. Its rigorous demands make composition of this verse form a rather tough task, but Guru Arjan Dev takes the closely

placed hurdles in his stride and produces beautiful lyrics, designed to be sung in Rag Majh, with slight innovation ; he rhymes the lines rather than sections thereof. One of them at page 217 reads :

Aao hamaaray Ram plaarey jeeo.
 Rain dinas saas saas chitaarey jeeo.
 Sant deyo sandesa pai charnaarey jeeo.
 Tudh bin kit bidhi tareey jeeo. (1.)

Sang tumaaray main karey ananda jeeo.
 Wan tin tribhawan sukh parmaananda jeeo.
 Sej suhaawee eh man bigsanda jeeo,
 Pekh darsan eh sukh lahiay jeeo. (2.)

Charan pakhaar karee nit sewa jeeo.
 Pooja archa bandan dewa jeeo.
 Daasan daas Nam jap lewa jeeo.
 Bino Thakur peh kahlay jeeo. (3.)

Ichh punree meri man tan haria jeeo.
 Darsan pekhat sabh dukh parharia jeeo.
 Hari Hari Nam japey jap taria jeeo.
 Eh ajar Nanak sukh saheey jeeo. (4.)

Again we find a singularly bold experiment in rhyming¹ in the following hymn:

Deen binon sun Dayaal,
 Panch daas teen dokhee,
 Ek man Anaath Naath
 Raakh ho Kirpaal. (Rahao).
 Anik jatan gawan karon,
 Khat karam jugati dhiaan dharon,
 Upaav sagal kar haario
 Nainh nainh huteh bikraal.
 Saran bandan karunaapatey,
 Bhav haran Hari Hari Harey,
 Ek toohi Deen Dayaal.
 Prabh charan Nanak aasro,
 Udhrey bhram moh saagar,
 Lag Santanaan pag paal.
 (Rag Kedara, p. 1119)

1 It rhymes as : a b c a, d d e a, f f a, g h a

Free verse is quite popular these days. It has thrown the yoke of prosody with its insistence on metre and rhyme overboard. In consequence, it is easier to compose and more conducive to gained at a heavy cost. This type of verse loses a lot in charm and force. It would not stick to memory. It cannot be sung. Guru Arjan had no use for its formlessness. It did not suit the ends which prompted him to wield his pen. And still, as if to furnish proof of the astounding reach of his genius, a piece of the said genre of poetry even, as appearing in *Rag Sarang* (p. 1230), attracts our attention:

Man bairaagaigee
 Khojtee darsaar. (Rahao),
 Sadhoo santan save kay
 Prio heearay dhiaayo.
 Aanand Rupee pekh kay
 Haun mehal paawongee.
 Kaam karee sabh tlaag kay
 Haun saran paraungee.
 Nanak Soaami garey miley
 Haun gur manaawongee.

Music

Guru Arjan Dev was well-accomplished in classical music excelling in both its fields, vocal and instrumental. It was because of this talent that, as stated earlier, Baba Mohan, who had refused even to see Bhai Gurdas of his door to beg for a short term loan of the 'Pothis's was so charmed by the singing of Guru Arjan Dev to the accompaniment of a 'sarinda' (a stringed instrument) that he parted with the treasure not just ungrudgingly, but with utmost pleasure. As a matter of fact, music committed to lofty ends had been there in the house of Guru Nanak Dev who chanted his way to numerous hearts torn by rapacious pulls of material attachments. If he (Guru Nanak Dev) had Mardaana at hand to play the 'rabaab' for him, Guru Arjan Dev was served by two musicians in the line of the same bard, Satta and Balwand. Not surprisingly, therefore, the 'Bani' of his predecessors in the spiritual office, which Guru Arjan Dev succeeded in collecting, was classified with ref-

erence to the relevant musical measures, rather than the subjects or topics.

The 'Pothis' that we have already mentioned and the other sources tapped by Guru Arjan Dev yielded Bani embracing nineteen Rags, namely Sri, Gauri, Assa, Gujar, Wadhans, Sorath, Dhanasari, Tilang, Suhi, Bilawal, Ramkali, Maru, Tukhari, Kedara, Bhairon, Basant, Sarang, Malhaar and Prabhati. He himself made extensive contribution to the material covered by these measures and composed hymns in eleven more Rags – Majh, Dev Gandhari, Bihagra, Jaitsari, Todi, Bairari, Gond, Nat Narayan, Mali Gaura, Kanra and Kalyan. The thirty-first measure, Jaijaiwali, appearing in the extant recension of the holy Granth was patronised by Guru Teg Bahadur, and his Bani was included at the instance of Guru Gobind Singh.

Personal Matters

One of the reasons for the success of Perfect or True Saints in winning the hearts of large masses of people and putting them on the spiritual path, is that they conduct themselves as ordinary human beings and this encourages the mortals around them to believe that the example before them is not impossible to follow. Only in this background one can understand why Guru Arjan Dev was so free, despite his august position, in unveiling his purely personal sentiments without any inhibition. When his wife, Mata Ganga, had the good fortune of giving birth to a son after a long wait, the Guru expressed his joy and gratitude to the Supreme Being in the following manner:

Satgur saachay deea bhej,
Chir jeewan upjla sanjog.
(Rag Assa, p. 396)

(A boon from the Satguru, destined to stay with us as he is, may the almighty grant him long life).

And when baby Hargobind survived a virulent attack of small pox, Guru Arjan Dev so innocently remarked:

Seetla tey rakhiya Biharee,
Parbrahm Prabh kirpa dharee.
(Rag Gauri, p. 200)

(The playful child was rescued from small pox,
the feat was achieved by the grace of the Lord.)¹

Instances of feelings concerned with private matters similarly vented can be found, again, in the Guru's reference to the discomfiture of his enemies in their attempt to poison young Hargobind² and Sulhi Khan's tragic end when he was on his way to attack the Guru at the instigation of Prithi Mal³.

Independent Point of View

As already observed, if the composition of a particular saint was in harmony with the fundamentals of Sant-mat, Guru Arjan Dev readily accepted it for the Granth Sahib under preparation; minor differences, if any, were straightaway ignored. For instance, at one place, Farid said:

Farida itt sirhaaney bhoiñ sawan
Keeraa lareo maas.
Ketriaan jug waaprey
Ikkat payaan paas.

(*Shlok Farid, p. 1381*)

(A brick serving as my pillow, the earth as my
mattress, maggots eating up my flesh, I might be
lying (in the grave) without turning a side for ages
and ages.)

Now what the Sheikh wanted to convey was his yearning to meet the Lord, which he did competently, forcefully. Therefore, the idea of his soul rotting in a grave for aeons, though directly in conflict with the Guru's belief in transmigration, was overlooked. On some other occasions, however, he did not allow such a disparity in view to pass and

1 Also construed as 'from the small pox God Almighty saved him.

2 Lep naan laago til ka mool,
Dusht Braahman mooa hoey kay sool.
(*Rag Bhalron, p. 1137*)

3 Sulhee tey Naaraayan raakh,
Sulhee ka haath kahee naan pahunchay
Sulhi hoey mooa naapaak.
(*Rag Bilawal, p. 825*)

made his own angle of vision known through a parallel couplet.

In one of his couplets Sheikh Farid says:

Farida paar patola dhaj karee
Kambalree pehreyo.
Jinheen weseen shauh milay
Seyee wase kareyo.

(Shlok Farid, p. 1383)

(I have torn my silken apparel and covered myself with a coarse woolen sheet. I will dress myself in any such fashion as will lead to my union with the Lord.)

The idea behind Farid's aforesaid statement is that he did not care what the world said about his style of clothing. He would not mind moving about in the shabbiest rags if that would endear him to the Lord.

The 'shlok' in question reflected the yearning of a real devotee of the Almighty to meet his Beloved. Lest a reader of the holy Granth should fall into the error of thinking that the clothes of a seeker can in any way improve the chances of his achieving the desired goal, the Editor added a 'shlok' of his own which says, 'Farid, Our Beloved is exuberant by nature and this exuberance in no way depends on what His creatures do. Dye yourself in the love of the Lord, that is the only robe that truly matters.'

Farida kant Rangaawla Wadda Wemohtaaj.
Allaah setee rattiya eh sachaawan saaj.

(Shlok Farid, p. 1383)

In another of his 'shloks' Farid made an observation to the effect that the impression carried by him previously was that he alone was a victim of pain and sorrow but on having a bird's eye-view of the world he came to know that no one any where was spared by the fire of suffering by which he himself was being consumed. Guru Arjan Dev could not countenance this type of sinking into the slough of despondency and employing a metaphor derived from his usual environs made the comment:

Farida Bhoomi rangaawlee
 Manjh wisoola baag.
 Jo jan peer niwaajia
 Tinhaan anch na laag.
(Shlok Farid, p. 1382)

(O, Farid, the world is full of lively colours and though there is a growth of poisonous plants also those who enjoy the Master's grace are not at all harmed by them.)

In one of his 'shloks' Kabir observes that though the Earth belongs to Saints, thieves too have come to inhabit it. The Earth does not mind their intrusion due to the magnanimity of its heart, and they continue enjoying its bounties:

Kabir Dhartee saadh kee
 Taskar baiseh gaahey.
 Dhartee bhaar naan biaapae.
 Unkau laahoo laahey.
(Shlok Kabir, p. 1375)

Guru Arjan Dev looked at the situation, however, from a different angle, a more practical one. Addressing Kabir himself he said :

Kabir chaawal kaarneey
 Tukh kau mohlee laaye.
 Sang kusangee baistey
 Tab poochhay Dharam Raaey.
(Shlok Kabir, p. 1375)

(Because of its association with the husk, the grain of rice gets beaten. In the same way, those who associate themselves with the undesirable become answerable in the court of Dharam Raj.).

It is said that a man is known by the company he keeps. Again it is a common place that whosoever has drunkards as his mates ends up taking to drinks himself, and one who visits a gambling den frequently may not be able to resist the temptation of trying his luck for the jackpot for long.

Aphorisms

Guru Arjan Dev had the knack of stating simple facts of life with rare force and beauty. In consequence, many of his lines have gained circulation as aphorisms. Some of them are reproduced here to serve as instances:

Sachay maarg chaldiaan
Ustat karey jahaan.
(*Rag Majh, p. 136*)

(One who pursues the path of truth, receives
laudation of the entire world.)

Jis key sir oopar toon Soami
So dukh kaisa paaway.
(*Rag Suhi, p. 749*)

(How can, he, my Lord, suffer, whom you protect.)

Maatee ka kiya dhopay Soami
Maanas kee gat ehee.
(*Rag Ramkali, p. 882*)

(Just as it is futile to wash the mud, in the same
way washing the body is of no avail.)

Aih kar karey so aih kar paaye,
Ikk gharree muhat naan laggay.
(*Rag Maru, p. 1098*)

(What one does with one hand through the other
hand is paid for. Delay is of moments, not hours.)

Aapan leeya jey milay
Vichhur kiun rovann.
(*Rag Majh, p. 134*)

(If what is yearned for could be had on one's own,
people would not be crying over their deprivation.)

Guru Arjan Dev shall continue to be remembered for all times to come as builder of the Hari Mandir (Golden Temple) reckoned as one of the wonders of India, the Universal religion preached by him through the holy Granth Sahib, his unique martyrdom in the cause of freedom of faith and, no less, for his spiritual poetry of outstanding merit.

BRILLIANT BEGINNING

Mera Man Lochay

Sahari Mal was a first cousin of Guru Ram Das. He invited the Guru to participate in the ceremony of his son's marriage at Lahore. It was late in the year 1581 A.D. (Sambat 1638). The matters engaging the Guru's attention at the moment did not permit his absence from the station. He offered apologies for his inability to be present in person, but promised to send one of his sons to the function.

Pirthi Chand, the eldest of Guru Ram Das's sons was adept at handling worldly business, but he could not tolerate some one else officiating at his father's court even temporarily and turning out, possibly, to be a potential rival. Therefore, he excused himself with cooked up reasons. Mahadev, the second son of the Guru, was a recluse and displayed total want of interest in the marriage ceremony, therefore, it was not considered advisable to force him to proceed to Lahore. When Arjan Dev was approached, he not only readily agreed to visit Lahore but also expressed happiness at being of some service to his father-Master.

The instructions imparted to Arjan Dev at the time of departure required him to join the celebration of the wedding, to hold 'satsangs' (deliver discourses) at Lahore, and to stay on till he was called back.

A month passed, yet there was no message from Guru Ka Chak. This unexpected prolonged separation from the Guru gnawed at the heart of the son-disciple and he could not help sending a letter, depicting his pitiable state, composed in verse. The letter fell into the hostile hands of Pirthi Chand, who counselled himself to suppress it. Since Arjan Dev interpreted the Guru's silence as indifference, the pangs of separation intensified and he made another attempt to remind his over-busy parent of the suffering he was undergoing. But his second epistle met with no better luck than the earlier one.

Arjan Dev was not unaware of his father's affection for him, so he began to suspect mischief somewhere. After writing the third letter on the previous lines, he pressed on the messenger to deliver it to the addressee personally and the letter did reach its destination. The Mark 3 put

on the missive was eloquent enough to reveal to Guru Ram Das the nefarious role played by his senior son in defeating Arjan Dev's endeavours to communicate with him, and Pirthi Chand was forced to part with the two intercepted despatches. Guru Ram Das could not resist the flow of sweet-bitter tears when he perused the three letters written in impassioned language, laying bare a devotee's heart, full of sincere love and devotion. The sense of fulfilment and bliss experienced on the reversal of his fortune was also expressed by Arjan Dev in the same way as he had given vent to his agony previously.

The four pieces of lyrical writing, presumably his maiden effort, came to be put together as a 'chaupada' (quartet) in Rag Majh. It appears at pages 96-97 of Guru Granth Sahib.

1. My heart yearns for a glimpse of my Master,
It wails like the rain-bird in agony,
My thirst would not go, nor peace return
Till I see my Saint beloved. (1)
Sacrifice am I, sacrifice over again
To the sight of my Master, my Saint beloved. Pause.
2. Charming is your face, dear one,
Music celestial what you speak,
Since long, long, have I not had
A glimpse of the Lord.
Blessed is the place
Which you grace with Your presence,
O, my patron, friend, and Lord. (2)
Sacrifice am I, sacrifice over again,
To my Master, patron, friend and Lord. Pause.
3. Separation from you even for moments,
Torments me like Kaliyug.
When shall I be meeting you now,
My loved one, my Lord ?
My night does not pass,

Sleep I do not experience,
 When deprived I am of the sight
 Of my Master's court. (3)
 Sacrifice am I, sacrifice over again,
 To the True court of my Master. Pause.

4. My fortune favoured and united me
 With the Master Saint,
 In my own home the Almighty Eternal I found.
 May I continue serving him ever,
 Not separating from him a moment,
 Even a fraction thereof,
 This says Nanak, your slave (4)
 Sacrifice am I, sacrifice over again.
 Says Nanak, your servant, your slave ever¹. Pause.

1 Mera man lochay Gur darsan taacen,
 Bilap karey chaatrik kee niaaen.
 Trikha na uttray saanti na aaway
 Bin darsan Sant piarey jeco. 1.
 Haun gholee jeco ghol ghumaee
 Gur darsan Sant piaarey jeco. Rahao.

Tera mukh suhaawa jeco sehaj dhuni bance.
 Chir hoa dekhey Saaring Paanee.
 Dhann su des jahaan toon wassiya
 Merey sajjan meet Muraarey jeco. 2.
 Haun gholee havan ghol ghumaace
 Gur sajjan meet Muraarey jeco. Rahao.

Ikk gharee na miltey taan Kaljug hota,
 Hun kad mileeay preea tudh Bhagwanta.
 Mohey rain na wihaaway neend na aaway
 Bin dekhey Gur darbaarey jeco. 3.
 Haun gholee jeco ghol ghumaace
 Tis sachey Gur darbaarey jeco. Rahao.

Bhaag hoa Gur Sant milaaya,
 Prabh abinaasee ghar menh paaya.
 Sev kareen pal chassa na wichhraan
 Jan Nanak daas tumhaarey jeco. 4.
 Haun gholee jeco ghol ghumaace
 Jan Nanak daas tumhaarey jeco. Rahao.
 (Rag Majh, p. 96)

Ever Effulgent Glory

Sukhmani

'Sukhmani' is widely accepted as Guru Arjan Dev's most important work, his magnum opus, it is believed to have been written close to the end of his brilliant spiritual career. It comprises twenty four 'ashtpadis', eight stanza verse-nits, each stanza carrying, apart from the shlok which heads it, ten lines.

This composition encompasses the basic principles of the Universal religion which True Saints preach. It endeavours to afford a glimpse of the greatness of the Supreme Being, dilates on merits of the Name practice whereof culminates in the aspiring soul's merger with Him, and highlights the importance of the Guru who in his grace grants the boon of the Nectar Name. To succeed on the Lord's path one has to lead a clean and pious life, resist determinedly the pulls of sensual pleasures and surrender to the Will of the Almighty, without reservations, wholeheartedly.

'Sukhmani' is recited by the devout every day in the early morning hours before taking in hand routine worldly business, and its content and style combine to ensure that they are rewarded with sweet peace and rare equipoise. It soothes hearts afflicted with pain and grief and imbues them with tranquility impregnated with joy.

'Sukhmani' happens to be the longest of Guru Arjan Dev's writings and enjoys top popularity. We quote here a few verses from the twelfth 'ashtpadi'; they bear on one of the pet themes of the Guru, curbing of conceit and cultivation of humility.

'Shlok' :

The meek, rid of their ego,
Humble, thrive in peace.
The mighty, bloated with conceit,
Are by their pride destroyed.

'Ashtpadi' :

He who prides in his authority to rule,
That dog is to Hell consigned.
One who fancies himself as handsome,
Is doomed to grovel in filth.
The one seeking credit for deeds noble,
Transmigrates in numerous forms.
He who is proud of his wealth and lands
Is a fool blind and ignorant.
Who, by God's grace, is with humility blessed,
Says Nanak, attains liberation in life
And bliss, beyond it. (1.)

The man gloating over riches possessed,
Shall not carry a dime with him.
He who derives confidence from legions of men
(Should know) they may be killed in a matter of
moments.

He who thinks himself as mightiest of all,
May be reduced to ashes in a single instant.
Who, inflated with ego, regards others as insignificant,
Him Dharam Raj to dishonour condemns.
Who, by Guru's grace, is of conceit relieved,
Is accorded approval at the Lord's court. (2.)

Summing Up

Mundaavnee

Placed in the plate are three articles,
 Truth, Contentment, Discrimination.
 Added to them is Nectar
 Of the Lord's Name,
 which serves to sustain all.
 If a person tastes this fare,
 Assimilates it,
 His salvation is achieved,
 It may not be thrown away,
 In any case.
 Bear it in mind
 All the time.
 The world, ocean of darkness,
 Can be swum through
 By clinging to the Lord's Feet,
 It is His manifestation, says Nanak,
 All that we see¹.

(p. 1429)

1 Thaal wich tin wastoo pucco
 Sat, Santokh, Weecharro,
 Amrit nam Thakur ka payeo
 Jis ka sabhas adhaaro.
 Jey ko khaaway jey ko bhundchay
 Tis ka hoay udhaaro.
 Eh wast tajeen naih jaece,
 Nit nit rakh urdhaaro.
 Tam sansaar charan lag tareeay
 Sabh Nanak Brahm passaro.

(p. 1429)

